

Agricultural Expertise and Knowledge Practices among Individualized Farm Households in Tajikistan

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Саҳар мегуфт булбул боғбонро,
«Дар ин боғ чуз ниҳоли ғам нарӯяд,
Ба пирӣ мерасад хори биёбон,
Вале гул чун ҷавон гардад, бимирад».

*In the morning a nightingale told the gardener,
“In this soil besides the seedling of sorrow nothing will grow.
A desert thistle will reach old age
But a flower, like a young person, may die.”*

Muhammad Iqbal

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Abstract

In the context of the post-Soviet restructuration of agriculture throughout Central Asia, the present thesis addresses farmers' approach to knowledge, taking the example of marginal mountainous areas in northern Tajikistan. Against the background of agricultural individualization processes in remote rural areas as the Zarafshan Valley, the study scrutinizes how farmers' approach and make use of knowledge to maintain agricultural livelihoods. The primary subjects of the study are thus individualized agricultural expertise and knowledge practices in everyday rural livelihood provision.

Departing from the perspective on knowledge and expertise in everyday agricultural praxis, the research integrates governance processes, which are conceptually considered being co-produced together with knowledge. Due to its volatile and uncertain outcomes, I conceptualize governance processes in rural Tajikistan as meshwork arrangements. Under the conditions of the neopatrimonial authoritarian state, the individualisation of Tajik agriculture unfolded as limited access order (LAO). LAO are political arrangements where the ruler or aligned elites limit the access to opportunities and resources for other political or economic actors. Such political economy allowed only for protracted agro-economic performance in remote mountainous areas as the Zarafshan Valley. Despite the almost complete individualization of local farm households, only a few of them are actually market-oriented producers.

The present research relates Zarafshani farmers' disregard for agricultural expertise with the noticeable attention to knowledge practices that potentially manoeuvre governance arrangements. Against the background of uncertain meshwork governance

arrangements and LAO, the individualization of agriculture did not create the conditions that farmers invest in agricultural expertise. The research proves that the reluctant agro-economic development in remote rural areas in Tajikistan is not linked to missing agricultural expertise, but to the dominance of governance matters, which farmers need to address in order to maintain rural livelihoods.

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Notes on Language and Transliteration

Data were predominantly collected in Tajik language. To denote Tajik terms I use transliteration of the Tajik language Cyrillic letters based on the standard of the BGN/PCGN, the United States Board on Geographic Names and the Permanent Committee on Geographical Names for British Official Use.

А а	a	О о	o
Б б	b	П п	p
В в	v	Р р	r
Г г	g	С с	s
Ғ ғ	gh	Т т	t
Д д	d	У у	u
Е е	e	Ў ў	ў
Ё ё	yo	Ф ф	f
Ж ж	zh	Х х	kh
З з	z	Ҳ ҳ	h
И и	i	Ч ч	ch
Й й	í	Ќ қ	j
Й й	y	Ш ш	sh
К к	k	Ъ ъ	'
Қ қ	q	Э э	è
Л л	l	Ю ю	yu
М м	m	Я я	ya
Н н	n		

Deutsche Kurzfassung

Die vorliegende Arbeit entstand aus dem zunächst unspezifischen Herangehen an die Frage welches Wissen mobilisieren tadschikische Kleinbauern in marginalen ländlichen Gegenden um ihren Lebensunterhalt zu sichern? Die post-sowjetische Individualisierung der Landwirtschaft brachte die grundlegende Restrukturierung des Wirtschaftssektors, aber auch Veränderungen der lokalen Politikgestaltung, sozialer Ordnung und Lebensgrundlagen (livelihoods). Vor diesem Hintergrund widmet sich die vorliegende Untersuchung der Frage, wie sich Wissen in der tadschikischen Landwirtschaft nicht als epistemische Verlustgeschichte entwickelt, d.h. als Abfall der hochspezialisierten kollektiven Landwirtschaft zur Subsistenzwirtschaft, sondern als Ressource individualisierter, privatwirtschaftlich orientierter Agrarbetriebe. Die Feldforschung entlang des Zerafshan Flusses in Nord-Tadschikistan belegt die Marginalisierung landwirtschaftlicher Expertise. Aufgrund fehlender wirtschaftlicher Anschlussmöglichkeiten fragen speziell Kleinbauern Agrar-Expertise nicht nach; ungewisse lokal-politische Prozesse verhindern Investitionen in Expertise zur Steigerung der landwirtschaftlichen Produktion und Vermarktung. Diese Situation erscheint als Wandel epistemischer Kulturen, mit negativen Auswirkungen für die lokale landwirtschaftliche Produktion. Kleinbauern fokussieren auf Wissenspraktiken, welche potentiell Einfluss auf die lokale Politikgestaltung nehmen. Diese Veränderung epistemischer Kulturen ist eine Reaktion auf ein volatiles politisches Umfeld und Herrschaftspraktiken, welche von begrenzten Zugangsordnungen (LAO) und meshwork governance (Flechtwerk-Herrschaft) geprägt sind. Zur Sicherung des Lebensunterhaltes versuchen landwirtschaftliche Akteure in erster Linie, Einfluss auf Politikentscheidungen zu nehmen.

Hintergrund, Problemlage und Fragestellung

Trotz politischer Stabilität, wirtschaftlichem Aufschwung und steigender landwirtschaftlicher Produktion in den Hauptanbaugebieten sind abgeschiedene (Hoch-)Gebirgs-Täler in Tadschikistan weitgehend von Armut geprägt. Die Mehrheit der Haushalte in entlegenen Gebieten bestreitet ihren Lebensunterhalt durch Arbeitsmigration in Kombination mit landwirtschaftlicher Subsistenzwirtschaft. Speziell in marginalen Gebieten ist die landwirtschaftliche Produktion und die gesamte wirtschaftliche und soziale Anbindung weit unter das vor-sowjetische Niveau gefallen. Dennoch besteht in Folge des demographischen Wandels, fehlender wirtschaftlicher Alternativen und politisch motivierter Verknappung eine starke Nachfrage nach natürlichen Ressourcen (race to access). Jedoch wirtschafteten zum Zeitpunkt der Feldforschung im Zarafshantal im Norden Tadschikistans nur wenige Haushalte marktwirtschaftlich orientiert.

Restrukturierung der Tadschikischen Landwirtschaft

Die Individualisierung der Landwirtschaft bezeichnet Transformationsprozesse in ländlichen Gegenden, bei denen kollektive Organisationen und Institutionen in kleinere Strukturen (wie Hoflandwirtschaften) umgewandelt werden. Gegenwärtig werden die meisten Flächen im Zarafshantal von kleinbäuerlichen Familienbetrieben (smallholder farm households) bewirtschaftet, welche im Durchschnitt aus etwa sieben Personen bestehen und etwa 0,5 Hektar bewässertes Agrarland zur Verfügung haben. Mit Blick auf die ländliche Entwicklung im Zarafshantal erscheinen fehlende Investitionen in marktorientierte Produktion und eine desolate Infrastruktur, etwa nicht vorhandene Irrigations-, Lagerungs- oder Transport-Infrastruktur, als zentrale Hindernisse. In diesem Umfeld stagniert die Produktion der Kleinbauern auf

niedrigem Niveau. Angebote für landwirtschaftliche Beratung sind gering und finden nur wenig Interesse. Zentralstaatliche Politik-Entscheidungen wie Agrar-Reformen werden von den Kommunen unterschiedlich implementiert, d.h. die Individualisierung der Landwirtschaft als Restrukturierung kollektiver Strukturen findet in den Sub-Regionen Tadschikistans unterschiedlich statt. Zudem darf der Prozess der Individualisierung der Landwirtschaft nicht über die Aufrechterhaltung limitierter Zugangsordnungen (LAO) in Tadschikistan täuschen. Der freie Handel mit landwirtschaftlicher Nutzfläche (arable land) ist faktisch unmöglich, Land ist nach wie vor im Besitz des Staates.

Politikgestaltung und Limitierte Zugangsordnungen (LAO) in Zentralasien

Regelungen bezüglich des Zugangs zu natürlichen Ressourcen (access) wie Land und Wasser sind für die Landwirtschaft zentral. Die vorliegende Arbeit übernimmt den Begriff limited access orders (LAO) als limitierte Zugangsordnung von North et al. (2012) zur Beschreibung von Zwangsregelungen innerhalb lokaler wirtschaftlicher Abläufe. Tadschikistan wird als neopatrimonialer autoritärer Staat charakterisiert, politische Machtressourcen basieren auf der Verteilung von Abschöpfungsmöglichkeiten (rents) wie Regierungsanstellungen, Landrechten, Wirtschaftsmonopolen oder dem Patronisieren geschlossener Arbeitsmärkte (Driscoll 2015). Landverteilungen als Teil staatlicher Reformen im Rahmen des Individualisierungsprozesses der Landwirtschaft verliefen in Tadschikistan uneinheitlich und führten zur ungleichmäßigen Verteilung von Ressourcen. Oft sind diese Regelungen und Entscheidungen nicht dauerhaft. Im Spannungsfeld von zentralstaatlichem Regieren und sub-regionalen Herrschaftsprozessen fällt die lokale Politikgestaltung ambivalent aus (Christophe 2005; Markowitz 2013). Das Regierungshandeln der

Zentralregierung ist neopatrimonial, d.h. der Staat ist auf den Präsidenten zugeschnitten, welcher mit Hilfe von Klienten, d.h. subordinierten Eliten und lokalen Gefolgsleuten herrscht. Herrschaft und Regierungshandeln (governance) findet statt, wenn Entscheidungen getroffen und implementiert werden. Neopatrimoniale Netzwerke dominieren die Relationen zwischen Zentrum und Peripherie und sichern die Machtressourcen lokaler Eliten. Damit verbunden sind lokale Zugangsordnungen (LAOs), welche in erster Linie die Abschöpfungsmöglichkeiten der Eliten sicherstellen, anstatt staatliche Reformen und Interventionen sicherzustellen. Dies hat zur Folge, dass zentralasiatische Staaten Schwierigkeiten haben, die eigene Agrarpolitik in ländlichen Regionen zu implementieren. Staatliche Organisationen fallen als Garanten zentral festgelegter Ordnungen aus, an deren Stelle eine ultraflexible Assemblage von Prozessen, Netzwerken, Institutionen und Organisationen treten welche auf verschiedene normative Systeme rekurren (meshwork). Die vorliegende Arbeit konzeptualisiert diese Prozesse als spezielles post-sowjetisches Herrschaftsmodell, bei welchem sich der Präsident zum Erhalt seiner Macht auf politische Ambiguität stützt und diese selbst befördert. LAO stützen neopatrimoniale Herrschaftssysteme und beziehen sich auch auf die Einschränkung der öffentlichen Meinung und Formierung von Öffentlichkeit insgesamt. Daraus ergeben sich Kommunikationsnormen, Rituale und Sprachregelungen (hegemonic narratives) über welche Macht ausgeübt, d.h. Herrschaft implementiert wird.

Fragestellung

Vor diesem Hintergrund widmet sich diese Forschungsarbeit dem Wissen welches von ländlichen Haushalten als relevant für die eigene Lebensgrundlage erachtet wird. Nach dem Ende der Kollektivwirtschaft veränderten sich die bisherigen

Wissensbeziehungen in der tadschikischen Landwirtschaft. Die Forschung belegt Probleme in Zugang und Anwendung von landwirtschaftlicher Expertise in Tadschikistan. Dabei hat gerade landwirtschaftliche Expertise für die Entwicklung ländlicher Räume eine wichtige Funktion (Assche and Hornidge 2015). Welche Wissensbestände werden von den lokalen bäuerlichen Betrieben (farm households) in abgelegenen tadschikischen Anbaugebieten als wichtig erachtet um den Lebensunterhalt sicher zu stellen? Kleinbauern sind sehr zögerlich in Bezug auf Investitionen in Innovationen. Welche Informationen und welche Agrar-Expertise werden von den Bauern nachgefragt und implementiert?

Theoretische Überlegungen: Wissen, Lokale Politikgestaltung, Epistemische Kulturen

Zur Bearbeitung der Fragestellung werden die Begriffe Wissen, epistemische Kulturen und lokale Politikgestaltung (local governance) erläutert. Wissen ist mit Verweis auf Berger/Luckmann als sozial konstruiert (socially constructed) begrifflich gefasst (1984), d.h. Wissen ist alles das, was als solches von der Gesellschaft anerkannt wird. Wissen wird mit Bezug auf Landwirtschaft und ländliche Gebiete im Rahmen dieser Forschungsarbeit hauptsächlich aus zwei Perspektiven betrachtet: Eng gefasst als Agrar-Expertise, d.h. technisches Anwendungswissen. Demgegenüber stehen angewandtes Alltagswissen (everyday knowledge) oder Wissenspraktiken (knowledge practices) lokaler Gemeinschaften. Dieses theoretische Konstrukt beschreibt relationale Kategorien durch welche sich die vorliegenden Fragestellungen analysieren lassen. Entlang dieses Ansatzes drückt der Verweis auf Wissen aus, wie sich soziale Gemeinschaften etwas selbst erklären, d.h. es handelt sich um Glaubenssysteme, Werte, moralische Muster, nach denen Menschen ihr soziales Umfeld sinnhaft verstehen. Diese

Wissensbestände bzw. Wissenspraktiken liegen in lokalen Gemeinschaften jeweils anders vor, da lokal entsprechend anders konstruiert wurde. Wissen wird gemeinsam mit politischen Prozessen ko-produziert, d.h. es entsteht untrennbar von Politikgestaltung und Macht. Im Anschluss an frühere Ansätze der Wissenssoziologie (Schütz, Scheler), welche nach der Verteilung von Wissen in der Gesellschaft fragen, widmen sich STS (Science and Technology Studies) dem Einfluss von Macht und Politik auf die Entwicklung von Wissensbeständen.

Lokale Politikgestaltung als Meshwork Governance

Die Politikgestaltung in den ländlichen Gebieten Tadschikistans recurriert auf verschiedene normative Systeme. In Tadschikistan existieren auf lokaler Ebene mindestens drei normative Systeme parallel: Staatliche Regelungen und Gesetze, lokale Werte und Traditionen sowie die Regeln des Islam. Die gleichzeitige Assemblage (Versammlung), dieser normativen Systeme in der lokalen Politikgestaltung verursacht Unsicherheiten (uncertainties), da Entscheidungen unterschiedlich ausfallen, kaum wiederholbar und schwer voraussehbar sind. Innerhalb der vorliegenden Forschungsarbeit wird die lokale Politikgestaltung in Tadschikistan als Flecht- bzw. Netzwerk Herrschaft (meshwork governance) konzeptualisiert. Meshwork Politikgestaltung bezeichnet das Zustandekommen von Entscheidungen und der Implementation von Beschlüssen aus dem momentanen Zusammentreffen (assemblage) unterschiedlicher Institutionen, Prozesse und Authorities. Herrschaft (governance) ist definiert als Entscheidung und dem Implementieren der Entscheidung (Mielke et al. 2011). In lokalen politischen Prozessen in Tadschikistan liegen Macht und Durchsetzungsvermögen (assertiveness) meist in den Händen von patrimonial kooptierten wirtschaftlichen und administrativen Eliten, sowie lokalen Autoritäten. Die Politikgestaltung auf lokaler Ebene

gestaltet sich in diesem Sinn als Netzwerk-Prozess (meshwork) aus staatlichen Interventionen und lokalen Übereinkünften überlappender Institutionen, Prozesse oder Organisationen, durch welche die Akteure Interessen formulieren, Konflikte lösen oder sich in Rechte und Pflichten fügen. Charakteristisch für meshwork Politikgestaltung sind Unvorhersehbarkeit von Entscheidungen sowie deren kaum realisierbare Wiederholung.

Epistemische Kulturen

Aufbauend auf den Sozialkonstruktivismus entwickelt Knorr-Cetina das Konzept epistemischer Kulturen, zur Beschreibung wie die Gesellschaft in einem bestimmten Bereich 'weiß was sie weiß' (1999: 1). Epistemische Kulturen definieren und bewerten Wissen und verdeutlichen damit, wie Wissen in der Gesellschaft verankert ist. Nicht alle Wissensbestände werden innerhalb einer Gemeinschaft gleich wertgeschätzt, d.h. epistemische Kulturen unterscheiden sich untereinander und sind unterschiedlich hierarchisch strukturiert. Als analytisches Programm beschreiben epistemische Kulturen die Bedingungen und erläutern die Entwicklung von Wissen in bestimmten thematischen Feldern. Zum einen werden verschiedene Bedingungen für die soziale Konstruktion von Wissen reflektiert. Zum anderen vermitteln epistemische Kulturen und Wissenskulturen den ideell-ideologischen Hintergrund zur Konstruktion von Wissen. In Zentralasien sind Wissenskulturen vorherrschend, welche von sowjetischen, neopatrimonialen oder islamischen Werten und Moralitäten (values and moralities) bestimmt sind. Epistemische Kulturen determinieren unterschiedlich das Entstehen bestimmter Wissensbestände. STS widmen sich den Entstehungsbedingungen einzelner Wissensbestände mittels Fragen wie durch Politikgestaltung und Machtverhältnisse epistemische Kulturen etabliert, stabilisiert und perpetuiert werden. Die Gestalt

epistemischer Kulturen ist nicht willkürlich, ebenso wie die Arrangements, welche die Konstruktion epistemischer Kulturen bestimmen. Epistemische Kulturen helfen, politische Regimes zu stabilisieren. Nationale Wissenskulturen setzen bestimmte Institutionen, Organisationen, Werte und Prozesse über andere. Die Gestalt epistemischer Kulturen ist geprägt durch nationale Wissenskulturen, wird jedoch, bspw. in der Landwirtschaft, ko-produziert von lokalen Werten, Ethiken und Macht-Konstellationen. Zentral ist hierbei die Berücksichtigung eines „co-productionist thinking“ (Jasanoff 2004). STS übernimmt bei der Betrachtung von Wissen und Wissenskulturen die Konzeption einer analytisch untrennbaren Beziehung zwischen Herrschaft (governance), Wissen und Macht, welche sich in lokalen Ordnungen manifestiert (Mielke et al. 2011; Mielke 2017).

Ergebnisse der Feldforschung

Die Feldforschung entlang des Zarafshan Flusses zeigt, dass landwirtschaftliche Expertise vornehmlich lokal besorgt wird. Lokale Kleinbauern sind weder an überregional agrar-technischem Wissen angeschlossen, noch daran interessiert, da sie nicht oder nur spärlich marktorientiert produzieren. Landwirtschaftliche Produktion ist für den überwiegenden Teil der lokalen Haushalte lediglich Subsistenz zum Lebensunterhalt. Fehlende wirtschaftliche Anreize und Schwierigkeiten, ein Einkommen durch landwirtschaftlichen Produktion zu erzielen, bilden das Haupthindernis für die Aufnahme und Umsetzung landwirtschaftlicher Expertise.

Krise Landwirtschaftlicher Expertise

Zwei Fallbeispiele verdeutlichen die Schwierigkeiten der Kleinbauern im Zarafshantal im Umgang mit speziellem

Agrarwissen: Zum einen die Schwierigkeiten im Abschätzen von Investitionen in private *dehqon* Betriebe, d.h. die Unklarheit bezüglich administrativer Prozesse und der involvierten Kosten. Zum anderen die Entscheidungsfindung bezüglich Investitionen, etwa Kartoffelsaatgut. Anbieter von Kartoffel-Expertenwissen oder Informationen aus der Distrikt-Administration werden von den Bauern mit Misstrauen betrachtet. Die Glaubwürdigkeit (credibility) bestehender zentralstaatlicher Agrar-Organisationen wie dem Landwirtschaftsdepartment (*agroprom*), Bildungs- und Forschungseinrichtungen ist massiv gesunken. Auf lokaler Ebene besteht Nachfrage nach externer Expertise, allerdings wird dieses Wissen nicht implementiert, solange die Qualität der Wissensbestände nicht durch Vertrauenspersonen verbürgt werden kann. Insgesamt besteht lediglich geringe Bereitschaft der Bauern in Zugang und Anwendung von Wissen zu investieren.

Wissenspraktiken: Bobogi Regelungen

Große Nachfrage besteht allerdings nach Wissen, welches potentiell in die lokale Politikgestaltung eingreift. Im Kontext unklarer und ambiguer meshwork Entscheidungsprozesse wird mittels Wissenspraktiken versucht bspw. Zugang zu landwirtschaftlichen Ressourcen (access) zu erlangen. In sub-regional unterschiedlichen Prozessen appellieren die Akteure an mehrere Institutionen zugleich (forum shopping). Lokale Zugangsregelungen wie *bobogi*-Arrangements zeigen, wie Bedeutung lokal über narrative Mobilisierung von Referenzen zum Islam, Familie und Tradition konstruiert wird. Die Macht solcher Bedeutungskonstruktionen wird evident, wenn landwirtschaftliche Politikentscheidungen vollständig an religiöse Institutionen wie *kaliddi Islom* verlagert werden.

Ariza Beschwerde-Briefe

Die entgegengesetzte Wissenspraktik zu *bobogi* Forderungen stellen Eingabe- oder Beschwerdebriefe an regionale und nationale Autoritäten und Organisationen dar. Der Gebrauch von Eingabebriefen (complaint letters), sogenannte *ariza*, dient dazu lokale Übereinkünfte durch den Verweis auf zentralstaatliche Gesetze, politische Prozesse und administrative Regelungen auszuhebeln. *Ariza* Briefe beziehen in lokalen Prozessen den Staat als Machtfaktor ein indem sie an das normative System des Staates appellieren. Soliche Eingabebriefe sind zugleich individuelle Machtmittel. Eine Besonderheit sind lokale Vielschreiber, sogenannte *arizaboz*, welche regelmäßig staatlichen Stellen unterrichten, d.h. Nachbarn faktisch denunzieren und damit erheblichen Einfluss auf lokale Entscheidungen nehmen.

Diskussion der Ergebnisse

Die Ergebnisse der Forschung lassen sich im Wesentlichen in drei Punkten zusammenfassen: Krise und Marginalisierung landwirtschaftlicher Expertise, Herausbildung und Durchsetzung politikbezogener Wissenspraktiken und dem Wandel lokaler epistemischer Kulturen.

Krise und Marginalisierung Landwirtschaftlicher Expertise

Durch die aus der Feldforschung gewonnenen Einblicke in landwirtschaftliche Unterhaltsstrategien ergibt sich, dass der bisherige Umgang mit Agrar-Expertise der vor allem durch die sowjetische Kollektivwirtschaft geprägt war, nicht weiter zu tragen kommt. Vor dem Hintergrund weitverbreiteter Armut sind die Bauern gezwungen auf die Sicherstellung ihrer Lebensgrundlage (livelihood) zu fokussieren. Dies geschieht jedoch nicht durch

landwirtschaftliche Intensivierung, sondern eine Kombination aus Subsistenzwirtschaft und Arbeitsmigration. In Folge wird Agrar-Expertise marginalisiert zugunsten von Kontextwissen der Politikgestaltung, d.h. um die Teilnahme an politischen und wirtschaftlichen Prozessen sicherzustellen. Kleinbauern fragen auf lokaler Ebene lediglich die Expertise erfahrener Bauern ab, externe Beratung (agricultural advice) hingegen wird, da lokal kaum nachprüfbar, skeptisch beurteilt und nicht implementiert. Willkürliche Eingriffe von Behörden in lokale Haushalte erfolgen mittels wage formulierten Gesetzen und administrativen Regelungen. Am Beispiel der Beschwerdebriefe *ariza* zeigt sich, dass agrar-technisches Wissen wertlos bleibt, solange der politische Kontext mögliche Veränderungen, d.h. Innovationen, nicht zulässt. So schneiden Bauern bspw. keine Aprikosenbäume, da die Legalität dieser Praxis von den Distrikt-Autoritäten explizit im Unklaren gehalten und potentiell geahndet wird. Somit schaltet das Wissen um Sanktionen das Wissen vom nötigen Gehölzschnitt aus. Staatliche Regelungen, wie beispielsweise die Reform der *dehqon* Farmen, wurden von den regionalen Behörden lange ignoriert und von Bauern kaum umgesetzt. Lokal wird Wissen somit eingesetzt um die Durchsetzungskraft von Institutionen im alltäglichen Leben zu beurteilen, d.h. zu bestimmen ob sie sanktionieren oder nicht. Schwierigkeiten im Umgang mit landwirtschaftlicher Expertise resultieren aus dem Misstrauen gegenüber externer Expertise. Vertrauen und Bürgschaft für Wissensbestände sind zentrale Kriterien für deren Anwendung. Dieses Vertrauen bezieht sich fast ausschließlich auf Personen und Institutionen des lokalen Umfelds.

Politikbezogene Wissenspraktiken

Limitierte Zugangsordnungen (LAO) sind Bestandteil staatlicher und sub-regionaler Herrschaftsmechanismen in Tadschikistan, bestimmen den lokalen Agrarsektor im Untersuchungsgebiet.

Aushandlungsprozesse über den Zugang zu landwirtschaftlicher Nutzfläche gestalten sich als Wettbewerb zwischen lokalen Institutionen, wie bspw. *bobogi*, und die staatlichen Gesetzgebungen der Landreform. Eventuelle Entscheidungen der Netzwerk-Politikgestaltung (meshwork governance) sind volatil (forum shopping) oft mit unbeständigen Ergebnissen.

Lokale Akteure greifen deshalb auf Wissenspraktiken zurück, wie das Mobilisieren von Religion im Falle von *bobogi* Forderungen oder das Verfassen von *ariza* Briefen. Diese Wissenspraktiken entwickeln konkreten Einfluss auf lokale Prozesse der Politikgestaltung (local governance processes). Der Verweis auf *bobogi* bildete in vielen Gemeinden des Zarafshantals bisher ein starkes Argument in Aushandlungsprozessen, durch welches Macht mobilisiert werden kann. Demgegenüber ist der Einfluss von *ariza* Eingabebriefen schwer einschätzbar. *Ariza* Briefe sind Versuche der Kommunikation und Einflussnahme auf den Staat, sie erwirken potentiell direkte Reaktionen von der Distriktadministration und zentralen Regierungsstellen. Durch faktische oder vermeintliche überregionale Unterstützung können sich *ariza*-Anliegen in lokalen Netzwerkprozessen verstärken und durchsetzen. Allerdings zeigt nur ein geringer Teil von *ariza* Briefen Wirkung. Erfolgreiche *ariza* Interventionen sind meist das Werk von professionellen Briefschreibern (*arizaboz*), welche als Informanten in Symbiose mit der Staatsmacht agieren.

Wandel Epistemischer Kulturen

Diese Beispiele belegen, dass lokale Akteure Wissensbestände abwägen und fallweise entscheiden. Die Feldforschung belegt die Notwendigkeit der Bauern sich für den Erhalt der eigenen, individualisierten Hoflandwirtschaften zu engagieren. Aufmerksamkeit und Konstruktion von Wissen wenden sich im Zarafshantal v.a. den unsicheren und schwer vorhersehbaren

Prozessen der Politikgestaltung zu. Wissenspraktiken versuchen, damit verbundene Unsicherheiten, d.h. konkrete Risiken für den landwirtschaftlichen Lebensunterhalt, zu reduzieren. Mit Blick auf die Aushandlung des Zugangs zu landwirtschaftlicher Nutzfläche ist im Zarafshantal insbesondere das Wissen von indigenen Traditionen, lokalen Werten und vom Islam relevant, wie im Falle der *bobogi* Forderungen belegt, während die staatliche Gesetzgebung keine zentrale Rolle einnimmt. Diese Ergebnisse machen den Wandel epistemischer Kulturen im Zarafshantal von vormals sowjetisch-strukturiertem, landwirtschaftlichem Expertenwissen zu individualisierten Wissenspraktiken deutlich. Dieser Wechsel wirkt sich jedoch negativ auf die landwirtschaftliche Produktion aus. Der Blick auf die Lebensgrundlage ländlicher Haushalte (rural livelihoods) sowie die verzögerte ökonomische Entwicklung der tadschikischen Gebirgs-Landwirtschaft zeigt, dass hier landwirtschaftliche Wissensproduktion und lokale Politikgestaltung in einem negativen ko-produktiven Verhältnis stehen. Wissen wird aufgewendet zur Kompensation von politischer Ambiguität, d.h. Meshwork-Arrangements. Die Unsicherheit bzgl. Entscheidungen und politischen Prozessen verursachen ein starkes Interesse der Bauern an Resilienz durch politische Absicherung, wie etwa die Intensivierung von Netzwerk-Verbindlichkeiten (patron-client relations). Aufgrund dieses politischen und ökonomischen Umfelds entwickeln sich gegenwärtig die epistemischen Kulturen im Zarafshantal entlang lokaler Politikgestaltung und Machtverhältnisse. Im Zuge dessen verliert Agar-Expertise an Bedeutung.

Schlussfolgerung: Entwicklungsperspektiven Tadschikischer Kleinbauern

Mit Blick auf die Eingangshypothese, welche die Bedeutung agrartechnischer Expertise für die kleinbäuerlichen Haushalte im Zarafshantal in Frage stellte, belegen die Daten der Feldforschung, dass die Bauern Alltagswissen und Wissenspraktiken derzeit als besonders relevant für die landwirtschaftliche Lebensgrundlage halten. Wissen und Gesellschaft wurden entlang Jasanoffs Diktum des „co-productionist thinking“ (2004) als gemeinschaftlich produziert analysiert. Die Entwicklung von Wissenspraktiken korreliert mit der Ambiguität lokaler Meshwork-Politikgestaltung. Kleinbauern im Zarafshantal konzentrieren sich nicht auf ökonomisches Wachstum sondern auf Resilienz, d.h. Fähigkeiten mit Mangel umzugehen. Diese Unterhaltsstrategie erfordert spezielle Anstrengungen bezüglich der Politikgestaltung, d.h. sie bewirkt in der Konsequenz die Akkumulation von Wissensbeständen und –praktiken welche sich auf die Politikgestaltung richten und nicht landwirtschaftlich produktiv genutzt werden können. Agrartechnische Expertise für Innovationen im Produktionsprozess ist dadurch in Entstehung und Anwendung behindert. In Folge geringer Anwendung und Nachfrage sind Verfügbarkeit und Qualität von landwirtschaftlicher Expertise ungenügend und halten nicht Schritt mit politischen, sozialen und ökonomischen Veränderungen. Lokale epistemische Kulturen sind gegenwärtig nicht auf landwirtschaftlicher Expertise gerichtet. Stagnierende Produktion in entfernten Gebirgsregionen resultiert nicht aus fehlendem Wissen, sondern aus der fehlenden politischen und wirtschaftlichen Begründung für agrarische Innovationen. Zur Steigerung landwirtschaftlicher Produktivität ist der Ausbruch aus dem `negativen' ko-produktions Zyklus von politikorientierten Wissen nötig. Dies erfordert die Stabilisierung lokaler Politikgestaltung, d.h.

durch die Reduktion von Meshwork-Regelungen und Klärung der Reichweite normativer Systeme. Mit Bezug auf die Landwirtschaft ist insbesondere die Vorhersehbarkeit von Entscheidungsprozessen von Bedeutung. Auf lokaler Ebene müssten Rechte und Freiräume der Bauern besser gesichert werden, sodass diese in landwirtschaftliche Innovationen investieren. Ohne Zweifel kollidiert eine solche Politik mit Tadschikistans gegenwärtiger neo-patrimonial-autoritärer Staatsräson. Die gegenwärtige Herrschaftspraxis des Staates basiert auf der Rolle regionaler und lokaler Machthaber, wogegen staatliche Administration und Exekutive kein normatives Korrektiv bilden. Für internationale Entwicklungskooperationen ergibt sich aus den Forschungsergebnissen insbesondere die Schlussfolgerung, dass die schleppende Transformation der tadschikischen Landwirtschaft nicht dem Mangel an landwirtschaftlicher Expertise geschuldet ist. Entwicklungsinterventionen müssen regionale und lokale Organisationen und Institutionen in die Lage versetzten Fragen des Zugangs zu landwirtschaftlichen Ressourcen anzusprechen und unter Einbeziehung der verschiedenen normativen Systeme zu regeln. Kooperationen sollten einerseits die Expertise von Bauern fördern sowie andererseits wirtschaftliche und politische Prozesse auf regionaler und provinzieller Ebene begleiten. Letztere Maßnahmen betreffen insbesondere die Bildung von Standardprozeduren und Formaten, nach denen lokale Konflikte abgearbeitet werden können.

Maps of the Region

Commonwealth of Independent States - Central Asian States



Map 1 The commonwealth of independent states, CIS. Source: https://legacy.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/cis_central_asia_pol_95.jpg (accessed 12/2016).



Map 2 Topography of Tajikistan and its political context of Central Asia.¹

Source:

http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/tajikistan_rel01.jpg
(accessed 01/2016).

¹ The term Central Asia denotes in this research mainly the five post-Soviet republics of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan.

Acronyms and Glossary

<i>Agroprom</i>	Agricultural department at provincial or district level
<i>Amri ma'ruf</i>	Laymen talking about everyday phenomena to convince people about Islam
<i>Ariza</i>	Notification or complaint letter to the authorities
<i>Arizaboz</i>	Person that frequently writes <i>ariza</i> letters
Ayni	City in the Tajik Zarafshan Valley; capital of a homonymous district
Bobogi	Property claim referring to assets belonging to ancestors, i.e. synonym for 'property of the grandfathers'
Brigadir	Leader of a farm working group in the Soviet collective kolkhoz/ sovkhoz farm system
Collective farming	Until circa 2010 and beyond so called collective <i>dehqon</i> farms integrated most households and arable land in Zarafshani rural communities
<i>Dehqon</i> farm	Private and independent, i.e. non-collectively organized farm household
Dushanbe	Capital city of the Republic of Tajikistan
Extension	Conceptual approach to transfer specialized agricultural information and expertise to farmers
ha	Hectare, i.e. 10,000 m ²
hh	Household, farm household
<i>Hokim</i>	Tajik ruler or chief, often used to refer to the district chief
<i>Hukumat</i>	Notion for the district administration
Individualization	Post-Soviet process of dismanteling collective agricultural structures
Islam	Prevailing religious belief in Tajikistan with the Qur'an as Holy Scripture
<i>Jamoat</i>	Rural municipality often consisting of several villages

<i>Kalidi Islom</i>	Islamic key or the key to Islam. A decision-making procedure based on prayers
KGB	Commonly used abbreviation to refer to the Tajik state security committee GKNB
Khujand	Capital city of Sughd province
Kolkhoz	Soviet self-administrated collective farm enterprise
Kūhistoni	District in the upper Zarafshan Valley
Mastchoh	
LAO	Limited access order, economic and political classification introduced by North et al. (2012)
<i>Leskhoz</i>	Forest administration, previously Soviet collective forestry enterprise
<i>Mahalla</i>	Local neighbourhood association, smallest self-governing body in Tajikistan
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
NGO	Non-governmental organization and INGO for international non-governmental organization
<i>Nohiya</i>	Tajik notion for the sub-provincial district, with the <i>hukumat</i> as administrative center
PAKM	Potato Association Kūhistoni Mastchoh; local NGO of the upper Zarafshan area
Post-Soviet	Refers to the collapse of the USSR. Notion for the period since Tajik independence 1991
<i>Viloyat</i>	Tajik notion for province, e.g. <i>viloyati</i> Sughd, Sughd province
<i>Rāisi</i>	Chief
Remittances	Payments from workers abroad to households at home
<i>Shuroi deha</i>	Tajik term for the local village board; village self-governing body
Smallholder	Farm households with average or below average access to arable land

Somoni	Tajik currency. The average exchange rate of Tajik Somoni at the time of field research was at 1€ = 6 to 6,45 Somoni
<i>Sotiq</i>	Local square measure in Tajikistan. One <i>sotiq</i> equals a 1/100 of a hectare, i.e. 10m ²
Sovkhoz	Former Soviet collective farm under provincial or national administration
STS	Science and technology studies
<i>Tinji</i>	Tajik expression for wellness, happiness, peacefulness
USSR	Union of Socialist Soviet Republics
Welthunger-hilfe	WHH, German INGO, active in Tajikistan and the Zarafshan Valley
Zarafshan Valley	Mountainous and isolated sub-region in northern Tajikistan along the Zarafshan River, divided in three administrative districts, Sughd province
ZEF	Center for Development Research, University of Bonn

1 Introduction: Agricultural Knowledge in Rural Tajikistan

The present thesis addresses how farmers approach knowledge in order to maintain individualized agricultural livelihoods in marginal mountainous areas in Tajikistan. Departing from the explicit perspective on knowledge and expertise in everyday agricultural praxis, the research integrates governance processes, which are conceptually considered being co-produced together with knowledge. The primary subjects of the study are thus post-Soviet individualized agricultural expertise and knowledge practices in the context of everyday rural livelihood provision.

Rural livelihoods in marginal agricultural areas in Tajikistan struggle with the insufficient economic viability of local agriculture (Welthungerhilfe 2012b). Significant parts of the population in remote places as the Zarafshan Valley live below the national poverty line (WFP 2015), while agricultural production in mountainous agricultural areas stagnates on low level (Welthungerhilfe 2012b, 2015). Extension interventions as transfer of expertise by NGOs and international organizations experience difficulties and insufficient results in Tajikistan (Shtaltovna 2016). Previous research outlines that the transition from the collective Soviet agriculture to individualized production is a challenge to farmers' livelihoods in all post-Soviet Republics of Central Asia. In remote mountainous regions former, highly specialized collective production systems ceased to exist, although market-oriented full-time farm enterprises are still the exception. Marginal agricultural areas in Tajikistan face challenges deriving from massive demographic changes, limited natural resources, distance to markets and uncertain governance arrangements, which lead to a situation where farming is not the main source of income of the

majority of rural households (Bliss 2008; WFP 2017). By scrutinizing the unfolding individualization of agricultural production in remote rural areas, the present research follows farmers' approaches to knowledge to maintain agricultural livelihoods. The concept of epistemic cultures is introduced to identify the knowledge considered relevant by farmers, analysing how particular knowledge assets transform and develop within local communities. The research seeks to clarify how individualized farm households organize livelihoods and agricultural production. How is agricultural expertise available, approached and used in post-Soviet Tajik farm restructuring processes? Taking into account the moderate demand and supply of external agricultural advice, the research asks which knowledge is actually mobilized by farmers to ensure their individualized agricultural livelihoods?

Three central findings emerge from field research in the Zarafshan Valley in northern Tajikistan. Firstly, there is a crisis of agricultural knowledge and expertise. Currently, farmers' knowledge requests and practices are not geared to agricultural production. Large assets of previously available agricultural expertise are dismissed as not useful and have been lost. New sources of agricultural expertise and information are not always available or not trusted. Secondly, farmers turn to knowledge practices, which are oriented towards governance arrangements, especially concerning access to natural resources. In an economic context which is characterized as limited access order LAO, governance processes determine the chances of pursuing a farming livelihood. Thirdly, the research findings underline how epistemic cultures in rural communities are developing away from specialized agricultural expertise. Local epistemic cultures, in order to settle everyday agricultural affairs, have changed in rural Tajikistan. In comparison to the previous collective agricultural system, expertise and technical advice appear

in crisis, as they are hardly requested and trusted. Thus, current epistemic cultures emerge together with the post-Soviet agricultural restructuration processes; however, the economic individualization does not translate into intensified requests for agricultural expertise. The findings demonstrate that farmers do not link agro-economic development to expertise. Instead, epistemic cultures in the Zarafshan Valley shift towards governance oriented knowledge practices.

Post-Soviet Restructuration of the Tajik Agriculture

The post-Soviet restructuring processes in Tajikistan's agricultural sector widely replaced collective farming with individual production.² Dismantling Soviet *kolkhozes* and *sovkhoses*³ started as early as the end of 1980's on local initiative, (Roy 1999, 2007) and continued differently throughout the various sub-regions of Tajikistan. Since 1992, a series of laws regarding access to land and the structure of agricultural farm enterprises have come into existence (Caccavale 2005; Hofman 2013). Land reform processes and restructuration of farm enterprises have been pursued since then with the intention to dissolve collective farm structure and individualize agricultural production (Nekbakhtshoev 2016; Sehring 2009; Tuychi 2014). However, the implementation of land reform legislation in Tajikistan is sub-regionally highly diverse. Significant differences occur between cotton and non-cotton areas or high and low land areas (Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev 2017; Robinson et al. 2008), for instance with regard to the protracted dismantling of

² The notion post-Soviet in this study refers basically to chronological coherence with the period starting after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

³ *Kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* were the main types of farm enterprises in the former USSR. The terms stand for state controlled collective farming.

collective *dehqon* farms (Hofman and Visser 2014).⁴ The post-Soviet transformation of the agriculture sector released uncertainty among farmers and rural dwellers about economic perspectives and livelihoods (Dörre and Schütte 2014; Finke 2004; Kraudzun 2016; Kreutzmann and Watanabe 2016).

Agricultural production and output in the Zarafshan Valley is characterized by underperformance of farming systems and does not provide for the livelihoods of most smallholder households (Welthungerhilfe et al. 2008; Welthungerhilfe 2012b, 2012a). Despite the individualization of agricultural structures, there is still only a very small number of clearly market orientated full time private farming enterprises. The majority of rural households in the Zarafshan Valley is practising subsistence farming combined with non-agricultural income, i.e. remittances that are supplied by family members working in the cities or abroad (RuralPovertyPortal 2012; The World Bank 2014).⁵ Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Tajik government pursued different policies to individualize the agricultural sector. Development theories correlate the privatization and individualization of property with increased production efficiency (Rizov 2004; Verdery 2004), although, the post-Soviet individualized agriculture of Tajikistan did not follow this paradigm.

⁴ After the dissolution of the *kolkhoz/sovkhoz* system each member of the collective farm was entitled to a quota of land, which usually consisted of a set of land-use rights, i.e. shares of irrigated land, unirrigated land, garden land and other kinds of land. Despite the completely individual farming that ensued, most farmers remained members of the succeeding collective *dehqon* farm. The new collective *dehqon* farm kept the machinery, buildings and parts of the land and livestock for its use.

⁵ Poverty headcount rate in Tajikistan has fallen from 72 % in 2003 to 47 % in 2009, while extreme poverty declined from 42 to 17 % during the same period. About 5 million people, approx. 73 % of the Tajik population, live in rural areas (2010). About half of them were considered as poor in 2010 (RuralPovertyPortal 2014). About 50 % of the country's annual GDP comes from remittances. Predominantly young men from rural areas migrate either seasonally or long-term (The World Bank 2014: 1).

Farmers remain reluctant to start fully market-oriented farming businesses. Nominally the Tajik agricultural sector continues to grow (Lerman and Sedik 2009a; The World Bank 2014: 9f), however this development applies only partially to remote and marginal agricultural areas such as the Zarafshan Valley. In the Zarafshan Valley, as elsewhere in Tajikistan, economically viable agricultural production is realized only by a very small group of local elite farmers (Akramov and Shreedhar 2012; ICG 2011; IMF 2012). Various factors are complicating the productivity of agricultural production systems in Tajik remote rural areas. Farming households must cope with harsh natural conditions, limited access to arable land, poor infrastructure and distance to markets. Income from agriculture is low; most rural households rely on remittances from family members working outside the village. Smallholder farmers are not able to maintain full time agricultural livelihoods. As consequence, a significant part of the local working power, i.e. mainly male household members, have left rural communities. This entails that many smallholder households are led by women. Female lead households in Tajikistan often do not enjoy the same room for manoeuvre in village affairs as their male counterparts (Harris 2012; Mukhamedova and Wegerich 2014).

Rural Economies as Limited Access Orders

The individualization of the Tajik agricultural sector takes place against the background of a neopatrimonial authoritarian state and policy-making. This situation explains inconsistencies of the transformation process in the sense that self-proclaimed development goals of the Tajik government such as privatization and economic reforms did not fully take hold. North et al. provide a framework to address the problem of different development paths and patterns of political economy (2012: 4). Departing from the assumption that every country needs to settle the issue of who

controls violence,⁶ the authors identify “different *social orders*, distinct patterns of organizing society that allow us to simultaneously understand the operation of political, economic, and other systems” (North et al. 2012: 2). Accordingly, the framework classifies states in various access orders, i.e. from limited access orders LAO on one end to open access orders OAO on the other end, with intermediate steps in between.⁷ In the view of North et al., open access orders are a few Western democracies that ensure open access and competition. “Limited access orders solve the problem of violence by using the political system to create and allocate rents, arising from arrangements such as government contracts, land rights, monopolies on business activities, and entry to restricted job markets” (North et al. 2012: 2). This concept of LAO resembles a highly Western perspective as full open access orders display a mere theoretical ideal type situation (Chibba 2010). Also, market inconsistencies and democratic deficits in Western countries are not sufficiently considered in the framework. The somewhat schematic conception presented by North et al. (2012) is used in the present research to indicate the situation of permanent interlinkage of the state administration, economic and political actors in the context of post-Soviet Central Asia. Following North et al. (2012), the patterns of societal organization in several Central Asian republics as i.e. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan qualify as limited access order (Petrick and Pomfret 2016). The complicated and contradictory processes of the individualization of the Tajik

⁶ “In particular, this concept allows us to understand how society controls violence, the form of its institutions, the nature of its organizations—especially who can form them—and the dynamics of its economy. All of human history has had only three social orders in our framework” (North et al. 2012:2). For critical applications of this concept see: Melville and Mironyuk (2016) and Grabowski (2017).

⁷ In fact, the concern of the paper is to understand what makes countries shift from one access order to another (North et al. 2012).

agricultural sector provide a case for a LAO.⁸ “LAO are political arrangements in which the ruler or the coalition in power limits the access to opportunities for other political or economic organizations. The dominant coalition uses the organizations under its own control to create and distribute rents [...]” (Petrick and Pomfret 2016: 17). This mechanism is confirmed by Driscoll’s analysis of the Tajik warlords coalition game to maintain power (Driscoll 2015). It is in this regard that changes to the agricultural sector in the post-Soviet Central Asia are delicate as they require the patronage of the president to mobilize sub-regional and local clients. Changes in the agricultural sector are linked to access regulations, which are the domain of sub-regional elites. Due to the neopatrimonial features of the Central Asian states, change processes and centralized reform efforts release insecurity at local level. Local rulers possess significant leverage to control and subordinate farmers what obliges the central government to respect their interests too. Petrick and Pomfret identify a deadlock between the centre and periphery as particularity of the Soviet heritage and ask how agricultural policy making is possible within the limited access orders of Central Asia (2016).

Political Economy and Agricultural Policies in Central Asia as LAO

Although the former Soviet republics of Central Asia have comparable political systems and were classified as neopatrimonial LAO’s, the countries are pursuing different paths of individualizing

⁸ Tajikistan still maintains significant laws, regulations as well as Soviet legacies to control and steer agricultural production and commercialization. Farm land is property of the state. Laws are often used to limit farmers room for manoeuvre, not to guarantee rights. In the cotton sector, mandatory national production aims, so called *norma*, enforce monopolies in the cotton industry, crop quotas and manipulate farm debts (Hofmann 2017).

the agricultural sector,⁹ with different types of agricultural policies being implemented (Petrick and Pomfret 2016). Referring to economic output, the Kazakh model of authoritarian, bureaucratic modernisation (Petrick and Pomfret 2016: 19f) has realized best results throughout the region.¹⁰ While the Kazakh path of authoritarian modernisation appears a viable option to develop the rural economy, Tajikistan's agricultural policies, however, as comparable LAO case have had significantly less impact on agricultural production. Deviant agricultural development may be explained by the weakness of the Tajik leadership, which fails to exercise power over the entire national territory (Driscoll 2015; Heathershaw 2009). The sub-regionally selective implementation of the Tajik land reform is a case in point: "When development policy advice threatens the logic of stability in limited access orders, these societies often resist or sabotage the recommended measures" (North et al. 2012). In the case of Tajikistan, this consideration implies to recognize that specific agricultural policies formulated in the centre are never meant to be implemented on local level, but serve stabilizing arrangements of elites "coalition game" (Driscoll 2015). Due to the centre-periphery power sharing in the neopatrimonial state, local leaders have significant leverage to derail reform efforts. Nekbakhtshoev identified the collective farm managers as main opponents to "decentralized land reform strategy" (2016: 56). No doubt, incentives of the diverse groups of local actors to push forward or derail agricultural individualization are very different. Liberal policies, as land privatization and open access to markets and resources potentially means a limitation of

⁹ Within the framework of North et al. (2012) development within LAOs is anticipated. Kazakhstan possibly applies to the category of Basic LAO—Competitive Clientelist (North et al. 2012: 10).

¹⁰ The figures available at <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/tajikistan/gdp-from-agriculture> underline the diverse development. Data retrieved 01/2017.

the leaders' power base, as the resources for the own network are reduced (Markowitz 2016: 517). A consequence of this constellation is the deadlock of agricultural policies on national level as the ruler or the coalition in power is primarily occupied to maintain the *status quo*.¹¹ Agricultural restructuring and economic profitability are not necessarily central concerns of rulers in LAO regimes. The interests of elites may contradict with the efforts of authoritarian modernisation, e.g. as indicate experiences from the restructuring of the Tajik cotton sector (Hofman and Visser 2014; Nekbakhtshoev 2016; Van Atta 2008). Implementing change processes to individualize the cotton sector failed and went astrain in the various Tajik sub-regions. While the central government imposes reform policies, sub-regional distribution of power and interests may not be conducive to agricultural restructuring. Heathershaw underlines that local leaders eventually have the last word on how policies are implemented: "An emphasis on personal 'authority' necessitates that practices that are *de jure* codified are *de facto* dependent on the person who implements them" (2009: 112).

Race for Assets: Restrained Agricultural Markets in Tajikistan

Characteristic of limited access orders is the subsequent "race for assets" (Petrick and Pomfret 2016: 18) which creates collateral damage to the states' individualization efforts. From a rural perspective, the neopatrimonial political system in Tajikistan seems primarily occupied to ensure elites' privileged access to rural assets. The individualization of the Tajik agricultural sector turned out favourably only for a few rural elites and their clients. As in other

¹¹ "How rural economies are governed matters because it alters the balance of power between rulers and local elites by determining which set of actors controls the flow of rents" (Markowitz 2016: 516).

post-Soviet republics, individualization of the Tajik agriculture, “materialized partly as an unintended by-product of state withdrawal, privatization rules were implemented only cautiously. After all, state actors had an interest in foggy rules, as they weakened the bargaining power of outsiders and prevented the possible persecution of those who benefited from dubious deals ” (Petrick and Pomfret 2016: 18). Sub-regional coalition parties of the president may interfere directly in social and political processes, putting *ad hoc* decisions before legally binding directives. The implied lack of the rule of law contributes and enables the deliberate creation of uncertainty, starting at the president and trickling down to lower tiers administration and local elites. This is a common governance practice in post-Soviet rural societies, which provides for the representatives of the state and their clients ways to demonstrate power and gain additional income (Christophe 2005, 2006; Trevisani 2011). Due to the repeated and inherent contradictions of laws and regulations, it is difficult not to get in conflict with legislation in everyday life (Heathershaw 2009: 112). This situation creates uncertainty and is part of the specific post-Soviet type of political domination to maintain ambivalent rules and regulations. The resulting ambiguity is at best double twisted, i.e. ambivalence about national laws combined with uncertainty about state administration and local institutions (Christophe 2005). On the one hand side the rural population deliberately remains in a status of “legal illiteracy” (Sehring 2006: 95), while at the same time the significance and assertiveness of local organizations and institutions is fluctuating. State authorities maintain their dominant role without actually being present. In rural areas local elites assume functions of the state. Since state agencies often rule contradictory and ambiguously, farmers or businessmen are coerced to arrange protection [Russ.: *krisha*] for their assets through elites that are

powerful enough to remove ever-imminent administrative obstacles (Christophe 2006; Driscoll 2015: 52, 102). Requests from individual actors in rural areas cannot count on support by state organizations and are required to manoeuvre to resort to patron-client relations. Such relations are in itself resources of power and eventually patrons may provide assistance in individual governance processes (Boboyorov 2013a). However, in return for getting under the umbrella of powerful patrons – who are not seldom part of the public administration and thus representatives of the state – individuals are required to agree and promote the ideology and ruling paradigm of the state and government (Heathershaw and Herzig 2012). Such sub-cutan interrelations explain why crisis and insecurities in the political centre structures the reproduction of the system in the periphery (Erdmann and Engel 2006). The immanent intersection of the state ideological programme with everyday governance processes is characteristic for agricultural LAO and the post-Soviet political economy in particular. Resulting ambiguity and unaccountability have eminent impact on the agricultural individualization.

“[P]rivatization in Central Asia, when implemented, does not mean at all the creation of a new class of individual actors, market-oriented and supporting democracy and direct representation. In fact, almost everywhere it seems that so-called privatization has respected the traditional networks and solidarity groups” (Roy 1999: 119f).

Following this perspective corroborates that in the current state of agricultural restructuring the individualization of assets has been disparate and incomplete. Reforms to individualize agriculture unfolded sub-regionally different and provoked farmers’ race for assets (Kandiyoti 2007; Nekbakhtshoev 2016; Van Atta 2008).

Agricultural Expertise and Political Economy in Rural Tajikistan

Against the background of protracted economic growth and challenging livelihood provision the research analyzes the role of knowledge in the individualized agricultural production among Zarafshani farmers in northern Tajikistan. Knowledge is, with reference to Berger and Luckmann (1984), socially constructed. Agricultural knowledge and expertise in the Tajik Zarafshan Valley is thus all the knowledge that farmers consider relevant to agriculture. For analytical reasons this research distinguishes various knowledge assets, mainly agricultural expertise and knowledge practices that manage everyday life. Both categories are indicative and occasionally overlap. Access to agricultural expertise has profoundly changed since Tajik national independence. In course of the collapse of the Soviet *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* system, many of the institutional networks between experts, advisory personnel, research organizations, administration and policy makers ceased to exist (Shtaltovna and Mandler 2012). Agricultural expert knowledge that was integrated in Soviet research structures, is either lost or became outdated (Evers and Wall 2006; Morgounov and Zuidema 2001), while Tajik national research programmes drastically shortened (Beniwal et al. 2010). Agricultural offices coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) exist on different state levels, however are not always available and hardly considered a source for reliable information and advice (Bakozoda et al. 2011; Van Atta 2014). Farmers may select from a few sources for agricultural knowledge as external NGO and iNGO who potentially offer specialized advice. In a limited way also the available media is a source of agricultural information. Research points out that services are often of poor quality and not up to farmers' requests (Shtaltovna 2016). Farmers in remote areas of Tajikistan are

reluctant to invest in market-oriented production and innovation. Reluctant production and innovation among farmers were usually interpreted as lack of fit of extension and advisory services to the specific Tajik conditions (Engel and Simonetti-Techert 2015). Further, the discontinuity of external assistance programmes and projects create not only short-sighted results, but raises also little expectations on the side of farmers (MEDA 2006). Farmers request timely answers to agro-economic and political questions, which are not provided by the extension services available (Engel and Simonetti-Techert 2015: 5; Shtaltovna 2016). Considering the protracted agricultural development in remote rural areas and subsequent poverty illustrates that extension efforts and advisory projects failed to generate knowledge and develop locally adapted agricultural innovations (Mandler 2010; Shtaltovna and Mandler 2012). Agricultural extension practitioners aim for the “window of opportunity” (Hornidge et al. 2016; Roeling 2009) that allows to innovate, release investments and implement innovations. With reference to the particular challenges of advisory services, research indicated that the lack of agricultural innovation in post-Soviet countries results from adverse governmental policies paired with the absence of economic incentives (Mandler 2016; Petrick and Pomfret 2016).

Knowledge Structured by the Political Economy

Implicit to the assumption of positive interlinkages between economic privatization and increased productivity is the belief that access to knowledge and information will trigger agricultural innovations which subsequently lead to production gains and improved livelihoods (Hoffmann et al. 2009; Roeling 2009; Sanginga 2009). Although this logic generally holds true for capitalist economic environments, the Tajik neopatrimonial authoritarian political context appears to spoil and slow down the process of

progressive distribution of innovations. Local farmers operate economically and politically in circumstances described as LAO, monitored by neopatrimonial state authorities and local elites (Boboyorov 2013a; Harris 2012; Heathershaw 2009; Lemon 2016a, 2016b; Roche and Heathershaw 2010). LAO conditions effectively stall agricultural innovation efforts (Mandler 2016) as state and powerful elites may easily interfere in the public sphere and domains of knowledge production where they promote own perspectives and programmes (Amsler 2007). On local level state and sub-regional elites are able to limit the political and public sphere accessible for rural dwellers. Thus, limited access means to diminish farmers prospects and incentives to approach information and advisory services up to the point that market-oriented production is deliberately abandoned (De Danieli and Shtaltovna 2016). Van Assche underlines that in the post-Soviet states of Central Asia and the Caucasus specific agricultural knowledge cannot be separated from general dispositions of power and is unthinkable from governance (2016). I use a definition of governance as decision making and implementation of decisions (Mielke 2012). More specifically, in the context of Tajik rural areas a conceptualization of meshwork governance (Delanda 1995; Ingold 2011) is applied which captures the diversity of post-Soviet governance practices. The notion of meshwork refers to the non-binary character of either state rulings or local governance. Meshwork governance arrangements describe decisions and implementations through the simultaneous assemblage of institutions, processes, authorities (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 2003). Governance unfolds through various arrangements as competing and overlapping normative systems that refer to local traditions, the Tajik legislation and state ideology or refer to the

public understanding of Islam. Thus, such decisions are unpredictable and difficult to replicate.

Epistemic cultures outline the context to particular assets of knowledge, i.e. how knowledge is present or absent in certain fields or sub-regions. Local epistemic cultures emerge co-produced by governance processes and the social construction of knowledge in rural areas.

In the process of agricultural restructuring, some knowledge assets are growing while others are thwarted or simply fall out of interest. There is very little research available on knowledge in rural areas of Central Asia, especially in relation to the governance arrangements in place. With regard to the development perspectives of rural Tajikistan, this aspect is important and still under-researched, for which reason the present thesis seeks to close this gap. The research starts from the assumption that the individualization of the Tajik agriculture changed smallholders approach to agricultural knowledge. The post-Soviet transformation of agricultural knowledge structures forced farmers to develop an individual approach to agricultural expertise.

Knowledge and Expertise in the Individualized Agriculture?

The present research addresses farmers approach to agricultural expertise, information preferences and knowledge practices in the context of uncertain political conditions and transforming rural livelihoods. The research is going beyond the analysis of extension interventions in Tajikistan, considering farmers' everyday knowledge practices to run their households. Agricultural restructuring is not perceived as economic process, but outcome of political changes and sub-regional power arrangements. In the course of the individualization of the Tajik agriculture, farmers have

to rely on self-dependent agrarian knowledge. The research seeks to clarify: ***How individualized farm households organize livelihoods and agricultural production? How is agricultural expertise and knowledge available, approached and used?***

To capture the dynamics released by agricultural individualization, I adopt to a perspective on epistemic cultures that subsumes all assets of knowledge which farmers' link to agriculture. Local epistemic cultures, i.e. local cultures of knowledge production and sharing, describe how knowledge assets are situated in society, how they are created and warranted. This perspective provides insights about the value and significance that a community draws to particular assets of knowledge. ***How did rural epistemic cultures develop in the context of agricultural individualization in Tajikistan? Which knowledge is requested and mobilized by farmers to ensure individualized agricultural livelihoods?***

Methodology: Knowledge Practices in Agriculture

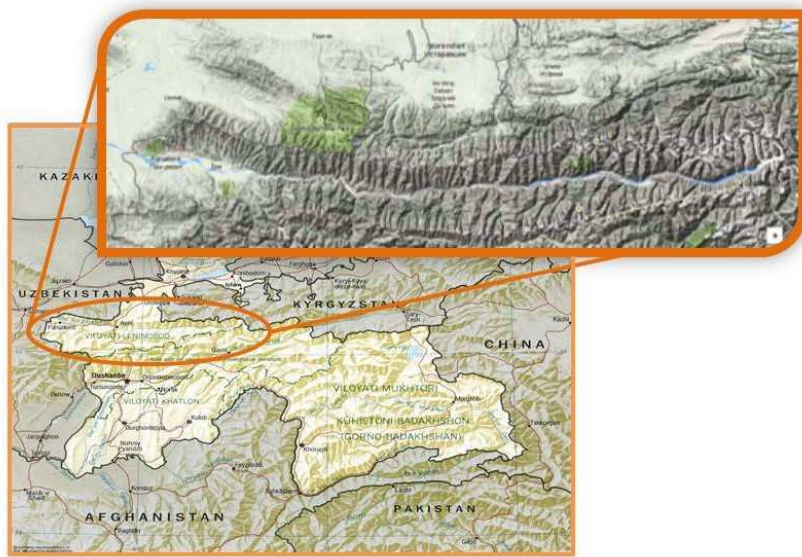
Parting from the initial problem statement of economically depressed agricultural development among smallholder farmers in marginal rural areas in Tajikistan, this interdisciplinary research draws on development studies, sociology and ethnography to capture in particular the role of knowledge in this context.¹² The approach of doing development oriented problem driven research, accepts different understandings of what the problem is (Ziai 2011). Therefore the protracted agro-economic development is analysed interdisciplinary; agricultural production is conceptualized as

¹² This entails the understanding of interrelations relevant for development policies and to encourage the rapid integration of new scientific knowledge into practice. Development studies is a multidisciplinary branch of social science concerning the prospects for future developments mainly in poor southern countries.

intersection of knowledge and governance arrangements.¹³ The present research is using case evidence as the genuine domain of social sciences to produce narratives that explain the complexities of farmers' knowledge practices. This approach creates interlacing narratives along case studies of certain knowledge assets as specialized expertise on potato or rice production. Other cases describe knowledge practices to claim access to land (*bobogi* claims) or to exercise power (*ariza* letters). Case studies are realized by a rigorous sociological research approach combined with qualitative anthropological field research. The geographic boundaries of the Zarafshan Valley constitute one part of the frame of this study. This includes to make 'developmental factors' explicit over time, as a string of concrete and interrelated events (Flyvbjerg 2011), which is particularly relevant in the context of frequent Tajik policy changes towards the reform efforts. Another frame of the study constitutes farmers' considerations of relevant knowledge to safeguard livelihoods. Thus, the mixed sociological approach enables to combine specific strengths of case studies, in-depth narratives and context, to address the above indicated development issue of a protracted agro-economic performance in remote rural areas.

¹³ Flyvbjerg speaks of development-oriented research (2001, 2006).

The Zarafshan Valley as Place of Study



Map 3 Topography of Tajikistan and the Zarafshan Valley. Sources: google/maps.com (accessed 01/2016) and http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/tajikistan_rel01.jpg (accessed 01/2016). Modified by the author.

The research took place in rural communities along the Zarafshan River in the north of Tajikistan. Data for this thesis has been collected by extended field research mainly in upper and lower parts of the Zarafshan Valley, especially in Panjakent and Kūhistoni Mastchoh districts. Research has been undertaken in four villages that were considered representative for the different agricultural production systems along the Zarafshan River. The Zarafshan Valley has been selected as it is rather remote from administrative, political and economic centres in Tajikistan. However, with regard to climate and natural resources, administrative set up, agricultural production systems, topography and access to markets it is easily comparable to other sub-regions in Tajikistan and Central Asia. At

the same time, the Zarafshan area is poorly researched. This study is based on data collected during eight months field research in Tajikistan in 2011 and 2012. The foremost way of gathering data was interviewing farmers in their home villages. The interaction with farmers followed an interdisciplinary methodology consisting of participant observation, semi-structured repeated interviews, and implementing a farm diary survey (FDS). Long term ethnographic field research allowed also for repeated semi-structured interviews. The methodology combined specific strengths of case studies, in-depth narratives and context, on the one side, and complement the study with quantitative data of the farm diary survey (Tajik Farm Diary 2013). Figure 1 below outlines the general argumentation of this study.

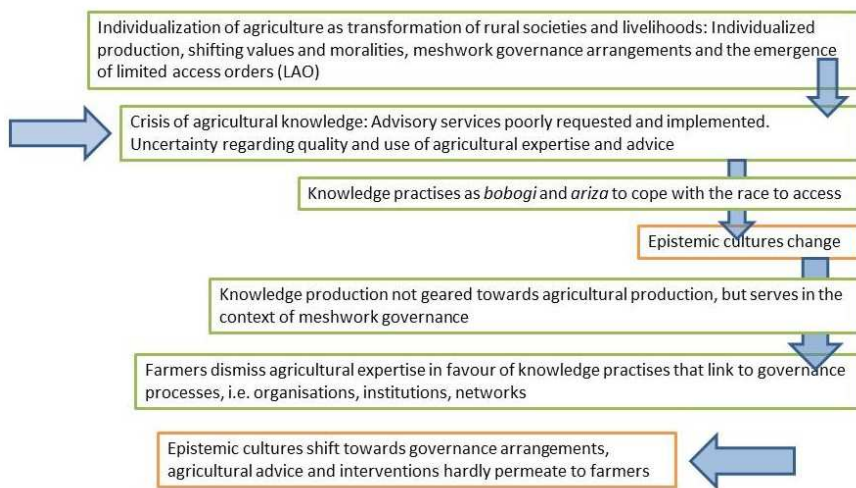


Figure 1 Post-Soviet transformation of the Tajik agricultural sector with its impact on epistemic cultures and agricultural expertise. Source: The author.

Structure of the Thesis: Outlook on Chapters

The following **chapter two** recounts general theoretical terms and conclusions used in the research. The chapter provides the theoretical framework of the present research. Initially knowledge is discussed in the context of rural areas as being socially constructed, which concerns both, everyday knowledge as well as agricultural expertise. Taking into account the dynamics of knowledge, its emergence, use and loss, the perspective on epistemic cultures is introduced. The concept of epistemic cultures outlines the context to particular assets of knowledge and thereupon underlining the fact that knowledge comes into being co-produced together with power and governance. The chapter proceeds with a discussion of various governance concepts, while putting particular emphasis on governance in post-Soviet societies. It reveals that in Central Asia Western theoretical governance approaches not fully apply, instead the mid-range concept of meshwork governance is found more suitable. Meshwork governance combines structural and processual views on governance. In the remaining part of this chapter the specific characteristics of post-Soviet governance arrangements in Tajikistan and Central Asia are discussed. **Chapter three** relates on empirical data from field research. The background to Tajik farm restructuring processes is discussed together with the political economy that initiated and maintains these changes. The chapter highlights the various stakeholders involved in the transition from collective to individualized agriculture in Tajikistan. The chapter concludes with an overview on how agricultural information and advice are available in Tajikistan today. The specific research questions and methodology used to address matters are presented in **chapter four**. The chapter elaborates the assumed shift of rural epistemic cultures from agricultural expertise towards governance oriented knowledge practices. This research entails a particular

social science approach to address these questions and relate findings to the general rural development in Tajikistan. **Chapter five** details the environmental set up of Zarafshan Valley, the emergence of individualized agriculture and current livelihood provision. It provides empirical insights of farming in the Zarafshan Valley, especially on the complicated access arrangements to arable land. In the context of limited access orders these arrangements have settled unequal distributions.

Chapter six to chapter eight resemble the empirical core of the study. **Chapter six** addresses the role of knowledge in the individualized Zarafshani agriculture. It reveals the crisis of agricultural expertise on local level, which farmers consider of disputable quality. Agricultural expertise from outside the community is simply not much requested. The chapter discusses three examples of how knowledge is approached in the Zarafshan. First, agricultural information and expertise, provided for instance by the media, NGO and external actors. Second, explicit agricultural expertise is discussed with regard to seed potatoes. Third, knowledge farmers consider relevant to manoeuvre administrative issues, i.e. the case of establishing the individual *dehqon* farm. Chapters seven and eight discuss prevailing knowledge practices in the Zarafshan Valley. These refer to principal issues of local farmers that is safeguarding and increasing the households' access to land. **Chapter seven** elaborates on local means to determine access to land by using the example of *bobogi* arrangements. It turns out that the state and its legal regulations are only selectively adhered in rural areas. **Chapter eight** displays another way of how knowledge is mobilized in the Zarafshan Valley. *Ariza* complaint letters are a frequent and ubiquitous practice to potentially exercise power over others. In contrast to the crisis of specialized knowledge presented in chapter six, the local institutions *bobogi* and *ariza* are presented

as examples of localised modes of contesting knowledge in rural areas. **Chapter nine** discusses the findings of field research. The individualization of agriculture created in the Zarafshani agriculture large bloc of smallholder farmers with severe difficulties to maintain a livelihood and who are limited in their potentials of organizing agricultural production. Taking into account the high level of specialization during the collective Soviet agriculture, the research reveals shifts of epistemic cultures that are responsible for the crisis of agricultural expertise in current Zarafshani agricultural production. The findings show that the focus of local epistemic cultures lies on governance arrangements. Local farmers seek to participate in governance processes, which are characterized as notoriously uncertain meshwork arrangements. Thus, knowledge practices focus on access arrangements, limiting the options of competitors or safeguarding own property. Re-orientation of epistemic cultures is aligned with the failures of agrarian expertise in the Zarafshan Valley. Agricultural expertise is out of use as long as individual farmers are not equipped with contextual, everyday knowledge, for example strong neopatrimonial networks, which allow valuating knowledge and putting expertise into practice. At last, **chapter ten** draws conclusions of the findings and their meaning for the future development of the Tajik agriculture. Uncertain governance conditions are not favourable for farmers to implement new knowledge as farmers choose to invest in resilience strategies. Failures of governance create a vacuum that allows those more powerful local actors to use the uncertain governance arrangements in their interest, while those less connected and less powerful will have difficulties making use of the vacuum in their interest. In this regard, knowledge practices remain predominant in rural epistemic cultures as long as no solution to uncertain governance arrangements is found. Agricultural expertise itself does

not ensure agricultural production and rural livelihood. Thus, at present time, local epistemic cultures in the Zarafshan Valley are caught in a negative co-production cycle of uncertain governance and knowledge practices. In order foster rural and agricultural development this negative cycle has to be overcome. The findings suggest that stabilizing governance arrangements, i.e. reducing meshwork governance and the impact of diverse normative systems, would be an incentive to farmers to consider agricultural expertise.

2 *Knowledge and Governance in Rural Central Asia*

The following chapter explains the theoretical aspects of how knowledge and governance are interconnected in Central Asian rural communities. Initially, knowledge is discussed in the context of rural areas as being socially constructed, which concerns both, everyday knowledge as well as agricultural expertise. Taking into account the dynamics of the emergence of knowledge, its use and loss, the perspective on epistemic cultures is introduced. Epistemic cultures outline the context to particular assets of knowledge and thereupon underlining the fact that knowledge comes into being co-produced together with power and governance. Establishing such co-productionist thinking underlines the presence of power and governance interventions in the process of the social construction of knowledge. Knowledge and governance are therefore conceptually considered inseparable.

The chapter continues with discussing the conceptualization of governance, with particular emphasis on research concepts that address governance processes in post-Soviet societies. In the Central Asian rural context, Western theoretical governance approaches not fully apply. I therefore develop the mid-range concept of meshwork governance in post-Soviet areas to avoid a binary perspective on governance as state rulings versus local governance. The notion of meshwork is meant to capture various processes that lead to governance and potentially to the emergence of order against the background of the simultaneous assemblage of institutions, processes and authorities. Meshwork governance combines structural and processual elements, which helps to explain the specific characteristics of post-Soviet governance arrangements in Central Asia. Meshwork governance conditions

exercise decisive influence regarding the co-production of rural epistemic cultures.

Epistemic Cultures in Agriculture and Rural Areas

Following a social constructivist approach to knowledge in agriculture and rural areas, this conceptual chapter aims to illuminate how members of society “come to know and simultaneously create what is real” (Giddens 2009: 273). In order to broaden the understanding of rural knowledge construction and comprehend sub-regional differences in Tajikistan, the notion of epistemic cultures is adapted to underline that knowledge is constructed in the context of individual affairs, external interventions, economic trends and local governance processes. This approach builds on insights from the sociology of knowledge and of science and technology studies (STS). Epistemic cultures highlight the particular context to knowledge assets, analysing practices and beliefs that constitute a culture’s attitude towards knowledge and its ways of justifying knowledge claims. Knorr-Cetina introduced the concept of epistemic cultures as “those amalgams of arrangements and mechanisms-bonded through affinity, necessity, and historical coincidence – which, in a given field, make up how we know what we know” (1999: 1). The field of epistemic cultures refers in this study to agriculture and rural communities. The ground-breaking study of Knorr-Cetina established epistemic cultures as central perspective in STS: “Epistemic cultures are cultures that create and warrant knowledge, and the premier knowledge institution throughout the world is, still, science” (1999: 1). While this perspective provides interesting insights, the concentration on scientific knowledge in academic institutions was criticised for ignoring cultural aspects. “Culture has been defined rather narrowly as practice, in this case the various practices used to

establish and maintain machineries of knowledge production” (Evers 2000: 11). Successively, the perspective of STS broadened its approach to knowledge and epistemic cultures were studied also in other fields apart from science (Jasanoff 2004; Wynne 1989). Evers reclaims the perspective of epistemic cultures for sociology, as these are “not only found in the laboratories of natural science research” (Evers 2000: 11) but in other parts of society too. Epistemic cultures can be identified around local arrangements, such as agriculture, which is structuring rural societies in Tajikistan. In the present research, the concept of epistemic cultures entails the analytic view on particular knowledge assets [Wissensbestände] in society combined with the specific context of governance and power.

Defining Knowledge

From an individual perspective, knowledge is a means to make informed decisions, necessary to strategically manoeuvre everyday processes. This implies an understanding of knowledge as sustained continuum of information, capacities and practices that enable actors to act. Defining knowledge is a first-rate philosophical question with long tradition, dating back to the Greek antique. Plato considered knowledge in the book *Theaetetus* as “justified true belief” (In: Gabriel 2013: 3). In Plato’s conception the individual in the centre of the epistemological process of substantiating knowledge. For knowledge, to come into being, there needs to be an ontological attachment to the individual cognition. Although, knowledge is bound to the actions of the single human, the epistemic findings need to meet within a truth-apt correlation [Wahrheitsbedingung des Wissensanspruchs] (Gabriel 2013: 5). A later definition by Duns Scotus in the 15th century takes the social aspect of knowledge into account: “Knowledge means explanation of the order of things” (Scotus 610: cap. IV, 6 et 7 concl.). Explaining

the order of things to others is bound to inter-subjective transmission. Being able to explain an action is an act of knowledge sharing. Scotus refers here to an important feature of knowledge: It is bound to society and shared with others. Thus, while knowledge is of central importance for individual action and attached to the individual, it is not a discovery of social constructivism that knowledge is dependent from society too. I will elaborate the social construction of knowledge further below. There is on the one hand the affirmative role of society to confirm truth claims of knowledge assets. On the other hand Scheler established already in his late works of 1928 the concept of knowledge as a basic condition of individual being (Seinsverhältnis). Rather than a static condition (commodity), he marked knowledge as “becoming” (werden) (Scheler 1976: 70). This processual aspect of knowledge, enabling the individual to act, has received much scholarly attention, also beyond the sociology of knowledge.¹⁴ Stehr and Grundman understand knowledge as capacity for social action (Handlungsvermögen), and referring to scientific knowledge as “capacity for action or capacities to intervene” (2005: 11). Putting competences as central feature of knowledge were outlined already earlier by Dewey and Bentley (1949), and result from individual potential to combine the known with the enacted knowing (In: Stehr 2004: 87). According to this strand of the sociology of knowledge, individual knowledge is learned from society, shared with society and required to interact with others. Knowledge is considered “more as a competence to do something than a compact good that one can transport and store” (Rammert 2004: 86f). Knowledge and individual action are closely interrelated, to the extent that actions represent a form of tacit knowledge (Knoblauch

¹⁴ The approach has been taken up for instance in the actor-network theory (ANT) by Bruno Latour.

2010: 163). While sharing the considerations for action, Stehr and Grundmann underline that the “realization of capacities of action and that of power, or better, control over some of the circumstances of action, are allies” (2005: 11). In this perception knowledge figures as instruction for action, while action is the evidence of knowledge. Similar to the consideration of Duns Scotus above, the connection of knowledge is an implicit reference to collective sharing. Flyvbjerg underlines that individual knowledge cannot be separated from society as it is learned and shared (Flyvbjerg 2001: 20f). In its more elaborated form, already the standard definition of knowledge involves today the understanding of an “Erkenntniszustand allgemeiner intersubjektiv-vermittelbarer Sicherheit bzgl. der Kenntnis einzelner Gegenstände oder prozessualer Vorgänge” (Neuser 1996: 574).

Prioritizing Knowledge

Knowledge assets in society are subject to selection and prioritization. Despite claims of eternal relevancy for certain physical laws or religious beliefs, knowledge is ontologically alternating. The interpretation of information or the accumulation of meaning are neither static, but follow temporal and spatial change processes. Referring to Foucault, contemporary post-modern philosophers dismiss the concept of truth or universal knowledge [universals] (Clegg et al. 2014: 7f). These are somehow delicate considerations when being linked to societies with closed world views and ruling hegemonic perspectives, ideologies and dominant strands of knowledge. Historical research for instance on science and academic activities, literature or economy in modern totalitarian regimes such as Fascist-Germany or the Soviet Union revealed vast evidence for very strict policies regarding knowledge. Flyvbjerg remarks that potentially prevailing “norms cannot be given a universal grounding independent of those people and that

context” (2001: 100). Thus, context is decisive for what and how knowledge counts. In rural communities for example, certain bodies of knowledge are canonized, while other assets do not apply. I will address the issue further below with regard to the situatedness of knowledge and explain why societies construct the stock of knowledge differently. The process of selecting and prioritizing knowledge continues through mutual recognition or non-recognition of different assets of knowledge. Accordingly, in everyday practice a short term accumulation of knowledge on particular issues takes place while other assets of knowledge are neglected or even abandoned, due to non-relevancy. In this regard, the factual loss of knowledge is taken as empirical evidence for the permanent structuring processes of knowledge assets (Evers and Wall 2006).

The Co-production of Knowledge Assets and Epistemic Cultures

Interdisciplinary scholars, such as Long, decline to engage in theorizing knowledge for emphasising its application and relevance: “I distance myself from general epistemological debates on the nature of knowledge and knowledge universals. Instead I aim to understand how knowledge impinges on the ordering and re-ordering processes of everyday life” (2001: 171). Long’s approach focuses on the practical and tangible traces of knowledge in society. Scrutinizing particular bodies of knowledge in agriculture and rural areas, it appears appropriate to further adapt the framework of epistemic cultures in order to understand what and how things are known in the processes of ordering everyday life. While local epistemic cultures are potentially open-ended and un-disclosed, they however display how certain bodies of knowledge dominate in the community and other knowledge assets get lost. This research perspective is based on the idea that knowledge is socially

constructed in society, a system of inter-subjectively shared beliefs that guide how people make sense of their environment. Stocks and preferences of knowledge assets are locally diverse, because of differing value systems and construction practices. Due to its foundation in scientific communities, STS originally did not question social interests and previous believe in procedures of knowledge production, relating to concepts such as boundary work (Gieryn 1983). This changed when STS scholars started scrutinizing the ‘co-production of science and social order’ (Jasanoff 2004). By introducing what she calls the ‘idiom of co-production’ Jasanoff asks: “Does it any longer make sense to assume that scientific knowledge comes into being independent of political thought and action or that social institutions passively rearrange themselves to meet technology’s insistent demands?” (2004: 15). Applying a co-productionist thinking of “natural and social orders as being produced together” (Jasanoff, 2004: 2) helps to focus on the drivers that structure epistemic cultures. As such, the STS perspective adopts a conception of an analytically inseparable relationship between governance, knowledge and power, glued together by a certain social order (Jasanoff and Wynne 1998; Jasanoff 2004) and thus converging to questions raised by the sociology of knowledge.

The Social Construction of Knowledge in Everyday Life

The sociology of knowledge, with conceptual inspirations from STS, allows addressing real world problems, such as knowledge in agriculture. This is conceptually and methodologically central for the present study, which seeks to identify knowledge assets that are actually requested and applied by smallholder farmers. The framework of epistemic cultures is adapted in order to understand how knowledge is created and warranted in different environments, how knowledge actually contributes to the agricultural

development in the Tajik Zarafshan Valley. This approach may deter inconsistencies of knowledge assets, it intendeds to display external and internal interferences with local epistemic cultures, displaying how knowledge is present, or absent, in certain fields or sub-regions. With regard to Foucault, I perceive knowledge exposed and locked to power, normative programmes and governmental paradigms (1989). The conceptualization of epistemic cultures allows to integrate diverging processes and interests in an overarching framework. It underlines how the various forms of expertise, everyday knowledge and knowledge practices are interrelated with processes of governance and power.

With reference to the post-Soviet and local-agrarian focus of the present research, I will look at knowledge in rural communities in everyday life. I use the term everyday knowledge not only when referring to any form of public knowledge, but also to pose this kind of knowledge analytically against the many forms of expertise that are relevant in agricultural production. In a general sense “everyday knowledge derives from practical reasoning about context-specific events”(Bevir 2007: 536) and is juxtaposed to scholarly knowledge based in scientific training. Berger and Luckmann undertake in their influential book *The Social Construction of Reality* (1984 [1966]) systematic steps towards a sociology of knowledge that addresses the ordinary stocks of knowledge in society. According to Berger and Luckmann “the sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such 'knowledge'” (Berger and Luckmann 1984: 15). Thus, all knowledge that is publicly negotiated is relevant. Everyday knowledge is socially constructed and, despite being influenced through power resources and governance processes, it also forms the local reality. Berger and Luckmann address this complexity, because “all human

'knowledge' is developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations" (Berger and Luckmann 1984: 15) and subsequently derive a research programme: "[T]he sociology of knowledge must seek to understand the processes by which [...] a taken-for-granted 'reality' congeals for the man in the street. In other words, [...] the sociology of knowledge is concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality" (Berger and Luckmann 1984: 15). Consequently Berger and Luckmann insist that it is "common-sense 'knowledge' rather than 'ideas' [which] must be the central focus for the sociology of knowledge. It is precisely this 'knowledge' that constitutes the fabric of meanings without which no society could exist" (1984: 27). Everyday, common-sense knowledge establishes reality in society and provides sense to everyday life. The experience of common-sense understanding is contributing to the formulation of identities, values and moralities as shown in the elaborated cases of Central Asian societies (Driscoll 2015; Harris 2004; Schoeberlein-Engel 1994).

Principally, the social constructivist approach is built on the assumption of various realities that communities create and experience. "Among the multiple realities there is one that presents itself as the reality par excellence. This is the reality of everyday life" (Berger and Luckmann 1984: 35). According to Berger and Luckmann, all knowledge, also the taken-for-granted common sense knowledge of everyday reality is derived from and maintained by social interactions. Within social constructivism, reality exists only through actors and action, through interaction, people's knowledge becomes reinforced (Knoblauch 2010: 157).¹⁵ With emphasize on rural societies, the flexibility and openness of everyday knowledge in society is recognized by Arce and Long (1992) who perceive

¹⁵ The attention to empirically traceable action links to the roots of social constructionism in the phenomenology of Husserl and Schütz.

knowledge as “constructive in the sense that it is the result of a great number of decisions and selective incorporations of previous ideas, beliefs and images, but at the same time destructive of other conceptualizations, understandings. Thus it is not an accumulation of facts but involves ways of construing the world” (1992: 213). While on one side knowledge is created and shared, other parts of knowledge lose their common-sense acceptance and are abandoned.

Constructivism, Power and Hegemonies

There are some important insights by STS that complement the social constructivist approach to knowledge. Firstly, local value and significance of knowledge equate with the differentiation and hierarchy of lay knowledge versus scientific knowledge (Wynne 1989). This means that on local level the different assets of knowledge are considered coequal. Secondly, STS research outlined that knowledge assets contain a localized and positioned component. But despite knowledge is situated in local context, this does not reduce legitimate truth claims. Third, building on approaches of the sociology of knowledge and Foucault, STS studies recognize the combination of knowledge, power and governance, up to the point that these are considered as inseparable entities. A significant branch of late STS concerns how knowledge practices come into being, with power interventions and governance arrangements as part of the process (Jasanoff and Wynne 1998; Jasanoff and Long-Martello 2004; Jasanoff 2005; Wynne 1989). Also allegedly value-free institutions maintain social elements as distinctive structures, commitments, practices, and discourses that vary across cultures and change over time. Each society is constructing knowledge autonomously and values it differently. Processes that shape reality, the inter-subjectively shared common sense, are certainly political as the selection of inputs added to the

commonly agreed knowledge is not arbitrary. Every knowledge asset potentially has a political dimension, as politics is often seen as grounded in the idea of 'pure' factual knowledge - which is biased by interests, values and worldviews too (Knorr-Cetina 1981). Knowledge, *per se* is far from being value-free, purely objective or non-judgmental [wertneutral]. The status of knowledge applied in society is eminently political because answering the question "Who decides what are the facts?" depends on power structures and the underlining state regime. It was mainly Foucault's work on the relation of power and knowledge as in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1989 [1968]) that broadened the understanding of the inevitable interference of power on knowledge processes. Foucault identified discursive practices as structures, e.g. scientific disciplines, which are in themselves institutionally grounded bodies of discourse that constitute what can become objects of knowledge and who has authority to speak about them.¹⁶ This approach was taken on by Flyvbjerg and others, who outlined that in the absence of truth universals, it is impossible to build an objective standpoint e.g. for scientific knowledge (1998: 227). Knorr-Cetina showed that constructivist patterns are equally found in the so called factual, scientific knowledge and that discovering 'real things' is always problematic, despite objectivists' beliefs that "the world is composed of facts and the goal of knowledge is to provide a literal account of what that world is like" (Knorr-Cetina 1981: 1). She argues that facts are the result of social constructions, because "constructivity [prevails] in terms of the decision-laden character of knowledge production" (Knorr-Cetina 1981: 152). It may count as

¹⁶ "The term refers to a historically and culturally specific set of rules for organizing and producing different forms of knowledge. It is not a matter of external determinations being imposed on people's thought, rather it is a matter of rules which, a bit like the grammar of a language, allow certain statements to be made". Quote from: <http://www.michel-foucault.com/concepts/> accessed 10/2017.

central achievement of constructivism to question hitherto totalized terms. “[W]hat may be deemed possible at one time may not be held to be so at another. A form of knowledge represents what is held to be thinkable, to be possible, at some moment in time” (Hacking 1999: 170). An ethnographic analysis must therefore name and accept the constructing forces that are at work.

Situated Knowledge and Alternative Modernities

The problem of the situatedness of knowledge has also been addressed from the angle of post-colonial studies (Tlostanova 2015). Mignolo’s statement “I am where I think” radicalizes the thought of the situatedness of knowledge (Mignolo 2011b: 169), referring to the fact that those who produce or claim knowledge are themselves positioned within a particular epistemic culture. This aspect of knowledge is insofar important as it underlines the developmental imperative [Anspruch] of advisory interventions. Mignolo criticises Western knowledge to which he refers to as the “Western code” (Mignolo 2011a), a ruling paradigm that serves primarily elites in North America and Western Europe. The “Western code” is in itself a persistent resource of power and political domination. Nevertheless, Mignolo identifies “processes of decoloniality breaking the Western code are already underway building global futures” (2011a: xiii). Mignolo may be taken as representative of the spectrum of post-colonial studies who show that alternative knowledge claims in science and elsewhere exist that deserve to be recognized. Such shifts in the status of knowledge reflect underlying changes in the relation of Western and non-Western societies. The era of modernity was characterised socially by industrialisation, the societal division of labour and philosophically by “the loss of certainty, and the realization that certainty can never be established, once and for all” (Delanty 2007:

3069).¹⁷ While this definition applies particularly to the Western world, processes of modernisation may have unfolded in non-Western societies completely different.¹⁸ “However, while European modernity should be admired for its many virtues, its imperial bent to ‘save the world’ by making of the world an extended Euro-America is unacceptable” (Mignolo 2011a: xiv). Such biases and path-dependencies of the global-Western academic conceptualisation of modernity is something contemporary area studies seeks to address (Mielke and Hornidge 2014). Informed by post-colonial and de-colonial studies (Fanon 1967; Mignolo 2011a; Tlostanova 2012), their central point is to consider the cultural relativity of how the natural and social world are perceived. Therefore, out of considerations of economic globalization, development studies and post-colonial perspectives, the term modernity is eventually thought as a ‘plural condition’ (Eisenstadt 2003). This has provoked discussions of alternative modernities juxtaposed to Western conceptions of modernity, displayed in deviant models of stateness, strands of knowledge, governance and conceptions about development. The new post-Soviet Central Asian nations make a striking case for such considerations. In the frame of this study, I enlarge the perspective of the original sociology of knowledge with components of STS (Jasanoff and Long-Martello 2004) and critical suggestions from post-colonial studies. Considering the situatedness of knowledge concerns not only development studies but eventually agricultural economics too.¹⁹ In this regard, difficulties arise when seeking common ground between

¹⁷ In this direction points also Zygmunt Bauman's concept of ‘liquid modernity’ as characteristic of Western societies.

¹⁸ Delanty states: “Modernity is not Westernization, and its key processes and dynamics can be found in all societies” (2007: 3069).

¹⁹ Jasanoff and Long-Martello note that “local knowledge is not merely ‘place-based’ but is also situated; that is, it is constituted within particular communities, histories, institutional settings, and expert cultures” (2004: viii).

local agricultural knowledge systems (Aenis 1997; Lemma 2007) and global expertise (Leeuwis 2004) in regional extension efforts and development interventions.

Local Knowledge, Knowledge Practices and Agricultural Expertise

The focus of the present analysis is on knowledge dynamics related to local agricultural matters. Such knowledge domains are usually discussed along categories as: Local knowledge, public expertise, indigenous knowledge, traditional knowledge, rural or horticultural knowledge, tacit knowledge and others (Carolan 2006; El-Berr 2009; Hornidge 2012, 2013; Taylor and Loë 2012: 1208f). The various approaches to local knowledge reveal that despite the narrow focus on the diverging qualities of knowledge²⁰, these categories broadly overlap and are analytically hard to differentiate. Consequently, with regard to the plurality of possible perspectives El-Berr states: „Eine einheitliche Definition, was unter lokalem Wissen zu verstehen ist, gibt es nicht“ (2009: 29). Conceptualizations of localized knowledge are often used in development research, agrarian studies, ethnography, anthropology etc. in form of specific mid-range concepts (Hornidge 2017; Taylor and Loë 2012: 1208f).²¹ Dealing in the context of development discourses and practices with forms of local knowledge is no easy task as there is broad agreement about the “crucial role of indigenous, traditional and local tacit knowledge for the development of communities [however, A.M.], basically standing in opposition to the ‘expert knowledge’ focused development paradigm” (Hornidge 2012: 29).

²⁰ The perspective on local knowledge runs the risks of providing narrowly focussed and occasionally individual results (El-Berr, 2009: 18; FN 43f).

²¹ Local knowledge is defined as “the mundane, yet expert understanding of and practical reasoning about local conditions derived from lived experience. In this sense, it is often juxtaposed with ‘expert’ knowledge” (Bevir 2007: 535).

This paradigm determines that agrarian expertise is normally not understood a part of local knowledge (Hoffmann et al. 2009; Lemma 2007) but deriving from academic training. Such non-expertise is attributed with the qualities of local knowledge such as “practice-based, context specific, interactively derived, lived experience-based, and tacit and involves practical reasoning” (Bevir 2007: 536). Acknowledging the insightful ethnographic perspectives on local knowledge, this research maintains analytically a distinction of everyday knowledge practices and agricultural expertise.

Everyday knowledge denotes the social reality as described above by Berger and Luckmann (1984). Everyday knowledge may concretize to particular knowledge practices, which may be expertise and experience in implementation and use. Agricultural expertise is science or longstanding local experience. Knowledge practices can be strategies or solutions to general issues, procedures of dealing with tasks or responses to recurrent everyday obligations. In this regard, knowledge practices are non theoretical knowledge, sometimes not even verbalized knowledge assets that is used to maintain everyday life.

Opposed to knowledge practices is the concept of expertise. While any knowledge about farming may be taken as agricultural expertise, there are normative structures that separate for instance general, everyday knowledge from expertise. From an outside etic perspective expert knowledge “is what qualified individuals know as a result of their technical practices, training, and experience [..]. Experts are usually identified on the basis of qualifications, training, experience, professional memberships, and peer recognition” (McBride and Burgman 2012: 13). Extension professionals, Western academia, training institutions, but also academic structures in non-Western countries (Amsler 2007) build and maintain such categories

(Collins and Evans 2002).²² With reference to Foucault above, institutions maintain hierarchies and hegemonic paradigms of what counts as expertise, which yields into normative framings of local agricultural knowledge “conceptualized as locally situated knowledge, held by a specific group of people, about agriculture-related ideas, resources and practices, composed of ‘traditional’ as well as ‘scientific’ elements” (Frey 2016: 94).

However, agricultural expertise from the emic perspective of local farmers look differently, as it is embedded in local values. In the case of Tajikistan, local experts are often elderly farmers who have gained experience through praxis. There is no sharp differentiation between local agro-expertise and everyday knowledge in rural areas, as both knowledge assets are available for everyone. Carolan seeks to place agricultural expert knowledge at the interface of science and local everyday knowledge. He suggests agricultural expertise is co-produced by local and other experts’ knowledge (2006), as through this hybrid character meaningful local adaptability is ensured. Agricultural expertise is therefore an inclusive term that displays the intersection of scientific research, academic training and local forms of everyday knowledge and practice. The “localization of ‘expert’ knowledge” (Hornidge 2012: 34) results from its socially constructed character, situated within a particular epistemic culture that comprises interferences of knowledge cultures, paradigms of modernity and power interests.

Co-production of Epistemic Cultures

It is one of the premises of this study that epistemic cultures, which make up “how we know what we know” (Knorr-Cetina 1999: 1) are

²² As a form of compromise appear Collins and Evans who delineate three forms of expertise with regard to agricultural production: I) No expertise II) Interactional expertise III) Contributory expertise (2002: 254).

neither fix nor static. Taking the perspective of epistemic cultures allows analysing change processes with regard to knowledge, especially its use, validity and social distribution. Building on Knorr-Cetina, I am following later specifications of STS (Jasanoff 2004) and sociology (Evers 2000; Leeuwis 2004), who enlarged and applied the concept of epistemic cultures in other areas than science. Leeuwis, for instance, adopts a perspective of different epistemic cultures being parallel at work in rural areas, i.e. on one side scientists' agricultural expertise and on the other side farmers' practical experience (2004: 105, 113). Negotiating a balance of this dichotomist processes is then the central task of agricultural extension efforts. With reference to specific challenges of rural areas and agricultural production in Central Asia, the present research seeks to understand factors and drivers that shape and condition the local construction of knowledge. Knowledge is related to the social context, structured by power, governance arrangements or the conditions of communication means. Knorr-Cetina started to reflect from a sociological and philosophical position on the infrastructures of knowledge production, as well as the culturally embedded production of these infrastructures (Van Assche et al. 2016: 32). Culture, in her understanding, refers to a delimited environment. Knorr-Cetina's concept of epistemic cultures came to "include small environments of knowledge production, the environment of these environments, the elements, and the preconditions" (Van Assche et al. 2016: 32). On a superior level, knowledge cultures make the environment to epistemic cultures. "Knowledge cultures, a complementary concept in Knorr-Cetina's frame (2007), can be understood best, as a wider concept, as the culture nurturing or hindering the working of epistemic cultures" (Van Assche et al. 2013: 4). The actual construction and development of epistemic cultures is determined by underlying and

potentially far-reaching mechanisms that couple power and governance with the procedures of knowledge production and dissemination. Knowledge cultures make the frame to epistemic cultures as they provide a “sort of scaffolding for epistemic cultures” (Knorr-Cetina 2007: 66). While the epistemic cultures in the realm of Soviet agriculture developed along clear networks of state organizations, research institutions and governance incentives, the emerging knowledge assets certainly did not leave the intellectual frame laid out by the communist knowledge culture. The result were e.g. “engineering-oriented” (Van Assche et al. 2016: 38) epistemic cultures in Soviet rural areas.

Against this background Knorr-Cetina’s framework of epistemic and knowledge cultures allows to analyse and relate local and national arrangements with regard to knowledge. Epistemic cultures incorporate the context to assets of knowledge, while knowledge cultures focus on national and global conceptions. The latter is considered as hegemonic narratives or ideologies. On the contrary to Van Assche et al. (2016) I do conceive epistemic cultures in rural areas also independently of state structures, as for instance linked to social, economic and religious structures. Knowledge assets are at first socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann 1984), epistemic cultures display the context of how knowledge assets arrange to power structures and to the local social order. Essentially, the perspective on epistemic cultures displays the context which determines how knowledge is constructed, disseminated, used and lost (Long and Long 1992). In this regard, epistemic cultures indicate which knowledge is considered relevant, how it is valued and applied by farmers. Change processes are subject to negotiations of power that follow social and political incentives, which may be central economic policies or constraints by limited access orders. Epistemic cultures appear thus as heterogeneous and potentially

unfinished processes because they are subject to permanent change. These processes are open to manifold interference from third parts, such as powerful elites, interest groups, or state authorities. Interferences may not only determine the construction and use of knowledge but also its distribution. Leaning on the insight of Schütz that “knowledge is socially distributed” (1964: 121), this translates into certain social structures, which recognize some strands of knowledge that are inter-subjectively transmitted and constitute local reality, while at the same time other knowledge is neglected. Schütz frames these mechanisms within “typifications of common-sense thinking [that determines] the social distribution of knowledge and its relativity and relevance to the concrete social environment of a concrete group in a concrete historical situation” (In: Berger and Luckmann 1984: 28). According to Scheler, it is the task of the sociology of knowledge to analyse how knowledge is distributed in society (Knoblauch 2010). A major selection of knowledge, for instance, occurs along gender roles (Nuijten 2003, 2005) or, with reference to rural areas and agriculture, the differentiation of farmers and experts (El-Berr 2009). Adapting Scheler’s thoughts to the concept of epistemic cultures implies to ask which knowledge is possibly generated by whom, who is able to make use of it. Subsequently the task is to identify how power structures interact with epistemic cultures.

It is evident that epistemic cultures are differently conducive to different assets of knowledge. Referring to knowledge in the individualized agriculture in post-Soviet Tajikistan, sub-regionally different knowledge practices and epistemic cultures emerged. Concretizing the STS approach of analysing co-produced and reciprocal knowledge and social structures allows to learn about sub-regionally diverging dynamics. Jasanoff points to the question of intrinsic power mechanisms by asking how epistemic cultures are

established, stabilized and perpetuated (2004: 39). She continues, with implicit linkage to Schütz and Scheler, to re-address the principal questions of the early sociology of knowledge on the social distribution of knowledge: “How knowledge is taken up in societies, how it affects people’s collective and individual identities, permitting some to be experts others to be research subjects and others to be resisters or revolutionaries [...]?” (Jasanoff 2004: 42). The study of inherent power relations in local epistemic cultures appears relevant, because access to knowledge in society is not arbitrarily. It is in this regard that the construction of epistemic cultures is not arbitrarily but reflects power relations. Long outlines how the encounter of power with epistemic cultures potentially unfolds. He underlines the linkage of the distribution of knowledge to the political agenda of elites. Long points to the daily struggle for power and dominance that is founded in different interests, “multiple realities” of local actors with “potentially conflicting social and normative interests, and diverse and discontinuous configurations of knowledge” (2001: 26f). Building on Long, then the frame of epistemic cultures

“must look closely at the issue of whose interpretations or models [...] prevail over those of other actors and under what conditions. Knowledge processes are embedded in social processes that imply aspects of power, authority and legitimation; and they are just as likely to reflect and contribute to the conflict between social groups as they are lead to the establishment of common perceptions and interests” (Long 2001: 26f).

Thus, single knowledge assets and entire epistemic cultures may be subject to power interference. By framing the distribution of knowledge in society, epistemic cultures help to stabilize political

regimes, maintain the dominance of local elites or sustain the local social order.²³

Power and Power Resources

Power is ever present in daily life, it is a crosscutting “net of omnipresent relations, and not only as being localized in ‘centers’ and institutions, or as an entity one can ‘possess’” (Flyvbjerg 2004: 405). Empirically power is localized in and related to certain resources and actors, however it cannot be possessed (Uphoff 1989: 320). Material or immaterial resources may become resources of power, e.g. “economic resources, social status, information, physical force, legitimacy and authority” (Ilchman and Uphoff 1969: 173). While resources do not contain power as such, they may generate power in relation to social or individual action or political support. Thus power is generated by individuals, organizations and institutions that are capable to access and provide a meaning to the resources at hand. Power is often attributed to authorities, such as state administration, sub-regional warlords or local strongmen who exercise power over others. However, at the same time power is a designing factor, “productive and positive, and not only [...] restrictive and negative” (Flyvbjerg 2004: 405). The particular access or use of resources allows to mobilize power. Thus, being timely and spatially fluid, attached to different kinds of resources and actors, power shall therefore be seen as a relational concept linked to interaction with its context (Uphoff 1989, 2003). Flyvbjerg follows this perspective depicting it “as ultradynamic; power is not merely something one appropriates, it is also something one reappropriates and exercises in a constant back-and-forth

²³ The focus on co-produced epistemic cultures allows to understand how everyday life and livelihoods are differently ordered by stocks of knowledge, governance arrangements and power interventions in a certain locality or sub-region.

movement within the relationships of strength, tactics and strategies inside of which one exists” (Flyvbjerg 2004: 406). Tracing power relations in society in order to understand ongoing governance processes is no simple task and not the centre issue. Foucault introduced the perspective that the “central question is how power is exercised, and not merely who has power, and why they have it; the focus is on process in addition to structure” (Foucault 1982: 217). According to Foucault, power is studied with a “point of departure in small questions, ‘flat and empirical’, not only, nor even primarily, with a point of departure in ‘big questions’” (Foucault 1982: 217). This intends to ask how power is structurally imposed on knowledge, on resources, etc. however, this is no linear process. Flyvbjerg points to some analytic difficulties related to power: “Knowledge and power, truth and power, rationality and power are analytically inseparable from each other; power produces knowledge, and knowledge produces power” (2004: 406). Powerful actors not only shape governance processes, but also enable or avert the enforcement of decisions. Power-knowledge relations and consequences are everyday phenomenon at the centre of social research, insolubly entangled with everyday life.

The Co-production of Epistemic Cultures in Rural Areas

Linking to the above, it is evident that rural epistemic cultures are closely related to local governance processes. The above introduced ‘idiom of co-production’ (Jasanoff 2004) refers to the processes of how knowledge comes into being together with political thought and action. Considering not only what we know, such as particular assets of agricultural knowledge and expertise, but also how we know it, requires taking into consideration the social and political

environment to knowledge assets. Knowledge “does not exist as such, but is produced, filtered, and disseminated by certain organizations/ networks, institutions and procedures” (Hornidge et al. 2016: 14) with exactly these processes being shaped by political processes. Also in rural areas and the realm of agriculture, some assets of knowledge are highly political. Accordingly, the outlined particularities of governance in post-Soviet societies indicate limitations of what and how knowledge is known. It is in this regard that the focus on epistemic cultures combines the analytic view on knowledge in society with the specific context of governance and power. This constellation is one representation of the nexus of governance and knowledge, or power and knowledge respectively as discussed above. I consider Jasanoff’s argumentation that co-productionist accounts reveal “unsuspected dimensions of ethics, values, lawfulness and power within the epistemic, material and social formations” (2004: 4) with epistemic cultures effectively stabilizing thereof conditions, as one representation of this nexus. Knowledge practices result within the structural frame of social order. Exploiting the ‘idiom of co-production’ reveals underlying ruling paradigms, values, and state ideologies that effectively build and frame epistemic cultures. With reference to co-productionist thinking knowledge, governance and power are inseparable within the framework of epistemic cultures as they emerge and act together. “Co-production can therefore be seen as a critique of the realist ideology that persistently separates the domains of nature, facts, objectivity, reason and policy from those of culture, values, subjectivity, emotion and politics” (Jasanoff 2004: 3).²⁴ Co-produced knowledge, and co-produced epistemic cultures as Knorr-Cetina

²⁴ Jasanoff restricts the ‘idiom of co-production’ to a mid-range concept. “However, co-production, in the view of contributors to this volume, should not be advanced as a fully fledged theory, claiming lawlike consistency and predictive power”(2004: 3).

gives the example of science, is thus inseparable and open to interference from outside domains (1999). The focus on epistemic cultures in the Tajik agriculture is exactly to analyse how the underlining interrelations between knowledge assets, governance processes and power evolve together. Epistemic cultures are socially constructed; they come into being co-produced with political thought and action. “To sociologists and social theorists, the co-production framework presents more varied and dynamic ways of conceptualizing social structures and categories, stressing the interconnections between the macro and the micro, between emergence and stabilization, and between knowledge and practice” (Jasanoff 2004: 4). In practice, the idiom of co-production highlights the constant and mutual interferences that shape epistemic cultures. However, co-productionist thinking means at the same time that epistemic cultures have a share in the conclusion of governance arrangements, steering of knowledge or the execution of power.

With reference to the questions of this study, rural epistemic cultures are analysed with regard to agricultural production. Thus, pointing out that under the conditions of post-Soviet Central Asia, agricultural expertise is interconnected to local governance arrangements. Knowledge assets are considered power resources that are potentially mobilized to interfere with governance arrangements. Local epistemic cultures identify and develop along potential power resources. In the context of Tajikistan, these may be connections to powerful persons, Islamic education or state administration. Thus, with regard to competitive negotiations within local governance processes, various claims are made on the basis of intersubjectively shared knowledge. Such claims may convince through consent with the social order in place or claims correspond to the interests of local elites. Negotiating local governance results

in “ongoing struggles over meaning and the control of strategic relationships and resources” (Long 1992: 27). Emerging governance arrangements relate on knowledge as central resource of power, mobilized through interpretations, meanings, hegemonic narratives. This implies to settle local disputes on applicable norms to a given conflict. “Knowledge encounters involve the struggle between actors who aim to enrol others in their projects, getting them to accept particular frames of meaning [...]. If they succeed then other parties delegate power to them” (Long 1992: 27). Respectively, knowledge assets are potentially always able to interfere and manipulate governance arrangements.

Framing Epistemic Cultures: Hegemonic Narratives

Influencing governance arrangements happens not only through processes of hierarchical steering but also through attempts to promote specific knowledge assets. In the specific context of post-Soviet Central Asia, some narratives and interpretations may become hegemonic due to the fact that questioning them is sanctioned either by state authorities or by society. Hegemonic narratives support the position of powerful actors. In praxis such narratives are instructed from the government in order to make the citizens undersign one political worldview, state ideology, LAO or buying into the promoted national identity. Lemon elaborates the example of a so-called counter-terrorist attacks in Tajikistan. Information and statements around the attacks are reframed until it fits into the “government’s narrative in reproducing its hegemony” (2014: 249). Under the conditions of the neopatrimonial state, such rulings can hardly be challenged. As a consequence, references to hegemonic narrations are also made from below. Citizens in peripheral areas refer to such narratives and arguments on national and local level to support own claims with some official approval. Popular narratives outline the strong and just rule of the president

or the uniqueness of agricultural production and quality. Contributing to such narratives is not an easy task, because one has to identify hierarchies, power resources of the relevant institutions and individuals. Hegemonic narratives are making “sense of the past” (Umetbaeva 2015: 297), however, from the perspective of the presence. Narratives not only refer to the president or to the state, rather to the increasing references are made to the values of Islam (Harris 2004; Stephan 2010). Such processes have a strong impact on the development of epistemic cultures and the specific approach towards certain knowledge assets. Epistemic cultures are co-produced by authoritative narratives, but also contribute to the steering of certain knowledge assets and therewith the mobilisation of power. Some assets of knowledge are dominant over others, evident in the sub-regionally diverse knowledge production, distribution, uptake and loss. Differentiation and local selection of knowledge assets is primarily a question of communal request. However, significant steering regarding knowledge assets is prescribed by the frames imposed by knowledge cultures which form ruling paradigms, ideologies and hegemonic perspectives. Hence, the co-production of epistemic cultures in neopatrimonial authoritarian states is influenced by dominant narratives that emanate from the president, the state administration, local elites and their respective clients. In particular the post-Soviet Central Asian republics maintain knowledge cultures that preserve manifold links to communist ideology and values, which have an important role in framing public opinion and everyday life. I will discuss further below the specific features of the post-Soviet public sphere. The context of ramified hierarchies along neopatrimonial networks creates a situation where particular knowledge assets conflict with national knowledge cultures and politics that maintain the LAO’s. As I will elaborate in the case studies below, contradictions of

knowledge cultures and local practice create opportunities for skilled individuals to make a living.

Conceptualizing Governance

Governance has become a central issue in social science in the recent decades (Bevir 2007; Bora 2012). The amount of research on governance is closely linked to the experience of limits and failures of state-centred governance concepts, especially in the context of severe state crisis as for instance the collapse of the communist eastern bloc states (Suny 1993). Equalling governance with the actions of the government and state administration turned out dubious taking into account that states which experienced long war periods such as Afghanistan still have rules and conceptions of order (Schetter 2007). Attention shifted from governments to alternative forms of governance, which are not or only loosely attached to the state (Bevir 2013; Bora 2012: 345f). The role of governments as authoritative actors that decide and implement decisions has been increasingly questioned, as such causalities are empirically not detectable in many parts of the world (Bevir 2007: 364; Malito 2015). Less authoritative definitions of governance build on insights of often ethnographical research that showed regionally diverse governance arrangements, as strong differentiations of global-Western and other regions of the world such as Africa, the Americas and also post-Soviet Central Asia (Bierschenk and Sardan 2003; Skinner et al. 2001). Parting from a perception of governance as „institutionalisierte Modi der sozialen Handlungskoordination, durch die kollektiv verbindliche Regelungen (policies) verabschiedet und implementiert werden“ (Börzel 2006: 2), I conceptualize governance as decision making and the implantation of decision (Mielke 2012). I consider governance arrangements as situated a specific regional context and argue for conceptual amendments for

how governance unfolds in the post-Soviet republics in Central Asia. In the following I will briefly discuss different conceptions of governance, from authoritative views to less hierarchically structured forms of governance through networks. This allows me to develop a mid-range perspective on governance suitable to the research region that I call meshwork governance, which builds on different authorities and diverse normative systems that compete in decision making and implementation. Out of the rich theoretical work on governance I pursue a mixed perspective. To capture the particularities of local governance in rural communities in post-Soviet Central Asia and Tajikistan I am using a mid-range concept of meshwork governance that combines structural and processual governance concepts. The term mid-range concept describes temporal, spatial and conceptual limitations of a theory (Hornidge 2017; Mielke 2017). This mid-range concept fits to the example of meshwork governance further below. Despite close conceptual overlapping, governance is distinguished from politics as a more *ad hoc* and potentially less organized form of making and implementing decisions. Governance is perceived as flexible and solution oriented, while politics appear linked to solid structures, following long-term management intentions.

Governance as Exercising Authority

Until a few decades ago, governance was almost exclusively discussed in terms of state authority and the hierarchic execution of power in a specific arena. An earlier World Bank definition referred to governance as “the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development” (The World Bank 1991: 1). However, measures of the governance and state measures were and continue to be equated, because “the concepts of governance and stateness remain vague

and narrowly interpreted” (Malito 2015: 21).²⁵ After political upheaval in eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union, state-inclined perception of governance as authoritarian rule increasingly came under suspicion (North 1998). Recent definitions circulated by the World Bank do not anymore equal the state with the government, perceiving the latter “as the set of traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised” (World Bank, 2006: 2). However, still the dominant and exclusive role of the state is outlined, which selects, monitor and replaces governments. Accordingly, governance is often linked to what the state does. This normative perspective appears to various degrees still in charge at development practitioners such as the World Bank, USAID, IMF or DFID (Grindle 2007). Central in these approaches is the perception of the state in charge of decision making and political steering, using administrative and other resources to impose its rule on the population. In this view, stateness is measured as the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement policies through a set of output indicators (Malito 2015; Umbach 2009). The government’s authority and capability to govern is expressed by providing binding decisions and ensuring the implementation of decisions. As for the authoritative view, Fukuyama sees “governance as a government's ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services, regardless of whether that government is democratic or not” (Fukuyama 2013: 3). Virtually, governments derive authority from the undisputed command over power resources such as the army, legislation and jurisdiction, dominance of information, etc. In such a scenario, respect and sub-ordination

²⁵ Malito states: “The term ‘stateness’ refers to ‘the institutional centrality of the state’ (Evans 1997), i.e. to the two basic conditions: the organizational capacity to formulate independent policies (Nettl 1968), and a coherent institutional framework indispensable to promote social cohesion (Jessop 1990). The latter two conditions presuppose the classical attribute of the state: Decisive control over the application of authorized force within the territory” (2015: 7).

of citizens under the state and its organizations and institutions is pre-assumed. However, this perspective is inadequate for many states especially in non-Western contexts. While in Western context the state remains the dominant authority in many fields, recent concepts of governance convey a “more diverse view of authority and its exercise” (Bevir 2007: 380). However, the so far dominant view of considering the state and the government almost as equal, i.e. strong and authoritative, has come under pressure and is substantially enlarged by post-colonial thinking and the renewed interest for local perspectives.

Less Normative Conceptualizations of Governance

Somewhat in opposition to the authoritative views on governance, slightly idealized and normative approaches developed that avoided explicit reference to power and authority. With reference to the concrete localization, i.e. in European usage, this view on governance refers to methods or mechanisms that deal “with a broad range of problems/conflicts in which actors regularly arrive at mutually satisfactory and binding decisions by negotiating and deliberating with each other and cooperating in the implementation of these decisions” (Schmitter 2001: 8). Accordingly, the normative and idealized aspects of this conceptualization hardly match outside Western-European context (European Union 2001).²⁶

Less normative conceptions accept that not necessarily the government is required to establish orderly structures and arrangements, instead governance takes place through “rules and institutions for the authoritative organization of collective life” (Donahue 2002: 1). Moderate conceptualizations seek for a more

²⁶ The European Commissions position on governance reads: “‘Governance’ means rules, processes, and behavior that affect the way in which powers are exercised at European level, particularly as regards openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and coherence” (European Union 2001).

neutral and balanced stand of what represents governance. Chibba captures governance as two dimensional:

“The first [dimension] refers to all aspects of the way a nation is governed, including its institutions, policies, laws, regulations, processes and oversight mechanisms. The second dimension is its cultural and ideological setting, for governance is perceived and shaped by values, culture, traditions and ideology” (Chibba 2009: 79).

While the above definitions display somewhat global-north or euro-centrist conceptualisations to understand and analyse governance arrangements, this indicates already the dependency of the concepts on different levels of generality and theoretical contexts. Therefore, complementary to the above discussed state-related perspectives, in the following I will focus on “processes (governance as a tool) and structures (governance as a form)” (Malito 2015: 3), leaving aside potential other categories, as the focus of this research lies on local governance. Literature provides two main strands to conceptualize governance, either as structure or process (Pierre and Peter 2000; Umbach 2007).

Governance as Process

Following the process-oriented perspective, governance is understood “as the continuous political process of setting explicit goals for society and intervening in it in order to achieve these goals” (Jachtenfuchs and Kohler-Koch 2004: 99). Governance takes place as a process of political steering, what implies the conceptual construction of the social environment through political institutions and procedures. Institutions, famously described by North as “rules of the game” (1990: 3), framing not only political processes, but enable or constrain social life and activities. However, a not less ideal-typical consideration of governance as political steering is provided by Mayntz who requests the „Fähigkeit zur konzeptionell

orientierten Gestaltung der gesellschaftlichen Umwelt durch politische Instanzen“ (In: Börzel 2005: 617). Thus, the process of political steering requires strategically acting subjects (Steuerungssubjekte) and objects that are governed (Steuerungsobjekte) (Börzel 2005: 617). Strategically acting subjects in this regard may be representatives of the state, but also local elites. It is central in the conceptualization of this thesis that the specific goals of the governance process are properly identified, i.e. to name the concrete intended achievements. Governance is thus a process of “hierarchical coordination, non-hierarchical co-ordination between public and private actors, regulated self-steering and societal self-steering” (Umbach 2009: 40). Analysing governance as a process hypothesizes the existence of clearly defined aims behind actions and decision making. The processes towards these goals may be started either through hierarchical and non-hierarchical steering. This can be governmental decrees, orders, the respective legislation or in the latter case majority voting. Hierarchies indicate the presence of power and exercise significant influence on steering processes. However, hierarchies are neither stable in the perception of governance goals, nor firm in the assertiveness and capacity to mobilize power resources. In favour of more flexible and reflexive perspectives on governance argue Manuel-Navarrete et al. underlining the “‘living’ process through which social goals and objectives are achieved. It is not a given, but a changing set of procedures and processes” (2009: 15). The perspective on governance as process contains different challenges. Firstly, it is based on the agreement of common goals and aims among the strategically acting subjects. Secondly, steering procedures and processes need to be identified to arrive at these aims. This works as long as hierarchies are strong, unquestioned and the goals of the steering efforts are not questioned. Although, as hierarchical orders

diverge, the respective governance aims may diverge and potentially fall in competition.

Governance as Structure

In contrast to the previous, governance is also conceptualized as a structure. Structure-oriented perspectives subsume that governance “includes different mechanisms of co-ordination and patterns of interaction of interdependent political and societal actors, institutionalised steering systems, collective action within institutions, strategic coalition-building and the implementation of decisions taken by networks, tripartite negotiation systems, public-private partnerships, and/or interest groups” (Umbach 2009: 40f).

According to this approach “governance encompasses the structural dimension of policy-making” (Malito 2015: 4) as a new “form of social order” (Börzel 2005: 617). The reference to social order means detectable structures, such as institutions, partnerships, networks, hierarchies or processes of interaction. It is the social order that forms the overarching framework for institutional arrangements (Mielke et al. 2011) and these structures provide the grounds for everyday decisions (Börzel 2005: 618). Thus, decisions that result of governance processes are at the same time a statement by the community, i.e. a normative programme, on how social order is shaped, referring to the underlying socially constructed reality. The relations of governance, power and the social order in place are mutually reflexive, however, social order is structured by power relations (Mielke 2012: 51f). The reference to power indicates why the structural perspective links to the traditionally institutionalized governance that leans explicitly on authority as indicated in the statement of the World Bank above (2006: 2). Structural governance relies on coordinated activities, resource allocation leads to the further development of these networks. In this regard researchers started to “develop typologies

of such governing structures—most commonly bureaucracies, markets, and networks—and they identify the characteristics associated with each structure” (Bevir 2007: 367). The significance of the social order for local governance arrangements is also recognized by Mielke et al. who perceive social order as “the structuring and structured processes of social reality [...] constantly generated by the interplay of worldviews and institutions” (2011: 1). This structure has been relevant even in times of the complete absence of the state (Schetter 2009).

Assemblages and Post-Soviet Meshwork Governance

The reference to the role of social order facilitating governance emphasizes already that decision making and implementation of decisions take place within a multitude or meshwork of processual and structural governance arrangements in a form of assemblage and which are not always separable. This involves different scales, governance arrangements may refer to local, national, international or transnational levels (Bora 2012: 346). Decision making and implementation of decisions is realized through flexible and hybrid forms of selectively structural and processual arrangements. With regard to the interleaving of the two conceptual strands, Börzel talks of „Verschachtelung oder Einbettung von Regelungsstrukturen“ (2006: 9). Especially with focus on rural areas, it becomes evident that one-dimensional and uni-linear conceptualizations of governance are hardly detectable, instead parallel, network oriented, reflexive and recursive approaches prevail (Bora 2012: 345). In order to develop a conceptual view that applies to rural areas in Tajikistan, I aim to synthesize structural and processual governance conceptualizations into the mid-range concept of meshwork governance. The concept of meshwork governance is used to describe the hybrid and volatile character of

local governance arrangements often found in Central Asia. I develop meshwork governance as mid-range concept to avoid a binary perspective on governance as state rulings versus local governance processes. The notion of meshwork is meant to capture the processes that lead to governance and the emergence of order in front of the simultaneous assemblage of institutions, processes and authorities. These processes are thought open and unfold with unpredictable outcomes. Ingold underlines “the importance of distinguishing the network as a set of interconnected points from the meshwork as an interweaving of lines” (2011: 64). The conceptual openness of the meshwork is linked to the analytical considerations of assemblage theory, which seeks to elaborate on the configuration of parts and wholes; the ordering of heterogeneous entities and how they interact for a certain time (Müller 2015: 28). “Across time and space, territory, authority, and rights have been assembled into distinct formations within which they have had variable levels of performance” (Sassen 2008: 5). Assemblage thinking goes back to Deleuze and Guattari ([1980] 2003) who used the approach as provisional analytical tool for social and urban planning questions, building on the premise of no predefined hierarchies, no single organizing principle behind assemblages. The framework prescribes that every assemblage is territorial, taking into consideration the micro and macro relations of spaces and places (Deleuze and Guattari [1980] 2003: 503f). With regard to post-Soviet areas, governance is characterized by the parallelism of structural and processual modes of governance (Kropp and Schuhmann 2014). While governance of state authorities relates on hierarchical steering, on local level horizontal structures negotiate decisions and implementations.²⁷ In post-

²⁷ This implies to perceive social order as horizontal structure. „Zum einen handelt es sich um Regulationsstrukturen (governance structures), sie sich auf

Soviet Central Asia such modes of governance are interlaced and simultaneous, it appears adequate to speak of a meshwork of governance arrangements, indicating that various procedures, institutions and organizations overlapping each other. The approach resembles what has been described as hybrid (Koehler and Zürcher 2004; Meagher 2012) or meshwork governance (Delanda 1995). It points to a diffuse distribution of power and authority, putting in the centre the coincidence of various modes of governance of one and the same matter. The notion meshwork governance refers explicitly to various hierarchies involved in governance arrangements by focussing on how communities “articulate heterogeneous components as such, without homogenizing [along hierarchies, A.M.]” (Delanda 1995: 1). Employing the term meshwork appears adequate in the present research as it refers primarily to local governance arrangements, underlining the alternating, parallel and overlapping presence of processes and structures that unfold together (Ingold 2011). In the post-Soviet context governance unfolds against the highly ambiguous presence of neopatrimonial state authorities. Powerful actors, institutions or organizations not only shape governance processes, but also enable or avert the enforcement of decisions. Similarly, Foucaults analysis of the broad meaning of power and government in European early modern times designates “the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed” (1982: 790). To govern, in this sense, “is to structure the possible field of action of others” (Foucault 1982: 790). In the case of Tajik LAO, the president and state authorities rule sector-wide through strong executives and neopatrimonial co-optation of elites, exercising tight control for instance over the public sphere, media and religious belief.

die Institutionen und Akteurskonstellationen beziehen. Zum anderen geht es um Koordinations- oder Interaktionsprozesse, die auf (wechselseitige) Verhaltensänderungen der beteiligten Akteure abzielen“ (Börzel 2006: 2).

However, on local level state governance processes struggle with significant voids and are only selectively able to implement their agenda. Decisions and demands formulated by the central government may, however, be limited by diverse interests of local elites. The term social order encompasses a mainly horizontal constellation of institutions, processes and actors that can be found in one locality in a certain moment of time (Mielke et al. 2011). The social order displays a normative programme that structures governance processes and arrangements, inevitable to all members of the community. However, individual actors find ways to manipulate or sideline institutions promoted by the social order, i.e. by submitting to patronage networks.²⁸ Despite additional transactional costs, the flexibility of how institutions are appealed and mobilized, indicates strength and assertiveness of powerful actors who exercise influence over governance processes (Lauth and Liebert 1999).²⁹ Under meshwork conditions elites outreach expands usually on more than one institution.

In order to sharpen the perspective on governance I will further focus on governance in rural areas of Central Asia, especially in Tajikistan. The specific view on local governance constitutes a particular situation of interference between representatives of the state and local institutions, organizations and processes. Governance on local level is subsidiary, linked to state authorities and non-state institutions, organizations and processes alike. Post-Soviet rural areas rely on various governance processes linked with diverse normative systems, which compete and complement with

²⁸ „Zum einen handelt es sich um Regelungsstrukturen (governance structures), sie sich auf die Institutionen und Akteurskonstellationen beziehen. Zum anderen geht es um Koordinations- oder Interaktionsprozesse, die auf (wechselseitige) Verhaltensänderungen der beteiligten Akteure abzielen“ (Börzel 2006: 2).

²⁹ Whereas actors often hide the logic of their operations and relying instead on the efficiency of other institutional or personal arrangements.

each other, often in accordance to the sectorial strong or absent state (Kropp and Schuhmann 2014: 66). In this regard, local governance processes are hybrid in a dual sense: Firstly, they unfold with or without the patronage of the state. Secondly, there is an overlapping of structural and processual governance elements. Structural forms of governance build in parts on the local social order in place, something Rosenau and Czempiel understand as “rule without formal government” (1992: 5).³⁰ This means a set of regulatory mechanisms implements decisions without the tools of state regulation (Malito 2015), but through local structures and processes. Local governance processes are in this regard meshwork arrangements of state interventions and local processes in form of overlapping institutions, mechanisms and procedures, through which actors formulate their interests, settle conflicts or comply with rights and duties (Mielke et al. 2011; Poos 2011). This kind of parallel existence of processual and structural forms of governance in local communities is perceived as transition away from hierarchical steering towards new forms of governance (Bora 2012: 345f). Theorizing local governance as hybrid or meshwork arrangement allows therefore a better understanding of the complexity of everyday processes in post-Soviet rural settings.

“Viewing governance in a more processual way enables us to invest the concept with reflexivity, and to better represent the conditional and changing ways in which individuals respond to others [...] built upon the idea that there exists a sphere of power characterized by competition, collaboration and power disputes, and populated by hierarchically organized factions” (Manuel-Navarrete et al. 2009: 15).

³⁰ „Rosenau (1992) versteht Governance als ein System von Regeln und die Governanceforschung als eine nicht mehr auf das „Machen“, sondern auf eine komplexe, netzwerkförmige Regelungsstruktur ausgerichtete Form der Beobachtung“ (Bora 2012: 346f).

The flexible understanding of governance as interplay of different actors, local processes and national authorities, with the sub-regional government as one actor among others describes a situation of assembled structures and processes. This approach appears adequate to capture governance processes in notoriously opaque institutional environments that determine agriculture and everyday rural life. Competitive processes seek to bend at decision making or implementation. With regard to Tajikistan, Driscoll underlines neopatrimonial dependances and warlord competition (2015). In this sense, governance is the implementation of decisions that follow “the outcome of factions competing for power” (Manuel-Navarrete et al. 2009: 3) which may sound simplistic from the perspective of the Western democracies. In an environment where the institutional distribution of power is not always clear, as post-Soviet Central Asia, the reference to the ever-implicit power competition is illustrative.

“Central to this framework is a diffuse notion of authority. Diffuse in the sense that authority is not a monopoly of the State, but an asset shared amongst competing organizations, including corporate actors and public institutions both local and distant” (Manuel-Navarrete et al. 2009: 3).

The diffuse notion of authority applies to the situation in the rural hinterland of the neopatrimonial post-Soviet republics. Local governance processes unfold as meshwork of state and non-state actors who compete over the decisions to be made. Power plays naturally a decisive role and is mobilized through patron-client relations, references to resources, networks or values and moralities (Mielke 2012: 32, 36f).³¹ While post-Soviet governments

³¹ Mielke substitutes the term ‘worldview’, as it insufficiently captures the everyday practice dimension of social order, with the term ‘moralities’.

put much efforts to maintain the linear processual model of governing through hierarchical steering, in praxis this is only achieved selectively (Roche and Heathershaw 2010).

Local governance in the post-Soviet context is thus characterized less by state structures, but to a large extend by phenomenon's as forum shopping, institutional bricolage and legal pluralism along different normative systems (Benda-Beckmann 1981; Cleaver 2002; Sehring 2009). The subsequent effect is meshwork and competition of decision making in form of various institutions, processes, authoritative rulings and implementations. Literature indicates that even for rural dwellers it is no simple task to determine which boards, institutions or processes settle decisions (Bliss 2012; Herbers 2006; Trevisani 2011).³² Hodgson provides evidence that despite being intrinsically interlinked, status and significance of institutions vary (2006). In rural areas, also thanks to the diffuse distribution of power, legal regulations, local traditions or religious institutions operate potentially coequally. Besides this structural competition (Börzel 2006: 3), also functional overlapping of different institutions and processes occurs, so called institutional bricolage, according to the diverse interests involved in the decision making process (Cleaver 2002; Sehring 2006). Meshwork arrangements remain volatile and intransparent because they refer to various normative systems as the state, religious norms, science or local traditions. Shifting between different institutions, organizations and processes is a common practice in rural communities because favourable decisions potentially depend on the respective forum. Benda-Beckmann described the selective and flexible approach to governing bodies among the Minangkabau in

³² Neighbouring rural societies in Afghanistan are an interesting comparison to post-Soviet Central Asia. Mielke shows that resource governance remote rural areas works on the basis of a more distinct social order with little interference of the central state (Mielke 2012).

Indonesia as forum shopping (Benda-Beckmann 1981). Accordingly, governance processes not necessarily remain with particular boards or institutions that are legally in charge, alternatively there are other forums and norms to appeal to. Thus, a general flexibility and ambiguity prevails about which forum is adequate to respond to the respective request. A forum is defined in analogy to Benda-Beckmann as institutions that potentially settle disputes (1981: 117). There are different kinds of forums operative within the local social order, for instance state or non-state, on local or national level, religious or secular forums. Local actors employ this flexibility by traveling with their requests from one forum to another, seeking the 'right' institutional setting to receive a positive response (Benda-Beckmann and Pirie 2008).³³ Forum shopping, as form of legal pluralism is something possibly avoided within European governance. Normative pluralism on the other hand builds on legitimacy deriving from non-state authorities, i.e. values and moralities. In rural communities in Central Asian, values and moralities refer to large extent on local understandings of Islam, Muslim culture and local traditions (Harris 1998; Mielke 2012; Roche 2013). However, moralities and mind sets are intrinsically nurtured from the values and ethics of the Soviet society (Markowitz 2012; Tlostanova 2012).

Communication and Framing of the Public Sphere in Tajikistan

Although meshwork governance arrangements display conceptual openness, this does not mean rulings in Central Asia are arbitrarily or weak (Heathershaw 2014). State regimes maintain a tight grip on policies down to the local level (Markowitz 2013). In the case of

³³ In a revised discussion, the concept of forum shopping is contextualized with the dichotomy order – disorder to underline its close relation to local institutions (Benda-Beckmann and Pirie 2008).

Tajikistan, the massive personalization of the state in the figure of the president is a major resource of power. Personalization of the state emerges together with the marginalization of formally democratic institutions that ought to ensure checks and balances of state powers. These structures fail to provide meaningful results in post-Soviet Central Asia (Driscoll 2015; Nourzhanov and Bleuer 2013). The Tajik civic-public space [öffentliche Raum] of media, political parties, associations or religious institutions is thoroughly dominated and co-opted by state authorities and their clients, who create detriments to the political opposition and the Islamic clergy alike (Lemon 2015). Democratic institutions and organizations are subordinated to personality of the President. The state maintains a strict observation of the political opposition and the media (Bensmann 2007; Loersch and Grigorian 2000). In this context, Western ideal-type public discourses following Habermas' discourse ethics (1990) are not applying to post-Soviet Central Asian societies. Instead, "bilden hier stark regulierte symbolische Interaktionen in Form von Ritualen, Mythen und Zeremoniellen die Grundlage einer offiziellen Sphäre von Öffentlichkeit, der eine informelle Sphäre gegenübersteht" (Ursprung 2008: 154). The public sphere in post-Soviet Central Asia systems is normative and regulated thanks to the surveillance and intervention of authorities and co-opted social structures. In consequence, the public sphere is mainly apolitical, with social and political issues being neglected or discussed informally, i.e. explicitly hidden from the public. Taking the example of Tajikistan; communicative spaces, where society is able to debate the range of own affairs are severely limited.³⁴ This is essentially a case of path-dependency, because previous

³⁴ Habermas discourse ethics see ideally citizens form the public and the audience for discourses. Habermas's was widely criticized for his attempt to formulate a normative discourse theory and its consequences for politics and jurisprudence (Flybjerg 2001: 48). The consequence, for Habermas, is that

“sozialistische Regimes einen sehr restriktiven Umgang mit Informationen pflegten und diese vielfach nur in verklausulierter, kryptischer Form weitergaben, begünstigte dies die Entstehung einer informellen Öffentlichkeit. Aus bruchstückhaften Informationen mussten sinnstiftende Erzählungen geschaffen werden“ (Ursprung 2008: 154).

Thus, the state in the post-Soviet space does not provide the full picture what encourages people to distil meaningful narratives themselves. This spurs demand and competition for information. Elite competition is part of the governance process, whereas specific information and knowledge serve to topple opponents while elites function at the same time as gatekeeper of exactly this information (Heathershaw 2009: 152).³⁵

The reference to the “informal public” (Ursprung 2008: 154) is certainly an important characteristic of post-Soviet societies; in the sense that there are significant assets of knowledge and information that people do not want to share publicly. Dividing social arrangements in public or informal (Helmke and Levitsky 2004) is part of everyday knowledge, thus completely internalized by the population (Hayoz 2015; Lebedeva 2006).³⁶ The consistency of the informal public is a legacy of the Soviet everyday culture and corresponds with the very restrictive information policy of the USSR (Oswald and Voronkov 2004). In Central Asia, in part due to the

human beings are defined as ontologically democratic beings, as *homo democraticus* (Flybjerg 2001: 90f).

³⁵ The approach to knowledge and information is in this regard opaque as it is considered a power resource. “The ethic of ‘authority’ demands that information and law are used and abused to maintain control, rather than being in themselves regulative of social control. [...] Where official information becomes a hidden weapon of ‘authority’ it is unsurprising that its public transcript is reduced to the provision of bland statistics, or is completely withheld.” (Heathershaw 2009: 112).

³⁶ Some arrangements are deliberately established informally, e.g. the practice of *blat*, a structured system of favours, that was in place all over the USSR but is still being used (Lebedeva 2006).

above mentioned democratic limitations as the absence of political competition, some hegemonic narratives and ideological *topoi* prevail, putting caps on political or economic topics. Accordingly, these topics do not enter the media and are not accepted in public debates. The public sphere prevails as ‘Präsenzöffentlichkeit’, which means that peoples statements only count when physically present. Conditions as the ‘Präsenzöffentlichkeit’ help to manipulate for instance governance processes as they impose symbolic, pre-structured, formal political rituals that constitute authority. Large parts of the official public sphere are characterized by ritualized forms of communication, which clearly depict hegemonic narratives, as particularly obvious in the celebration of canonized holidays and television broadcasts (Lemon 2014; Lewis 2016; Umetbaeva 2015).³⁷ Post-Soviet leaders and authorities in Central Asia subscribed to previous governance practices, as they were able to build on the persisting mind-set (Driscoll 2015: 125f), while embarking on new national symbols and subsequent hegemonic narratives (Roy 2007).

³⁷ Exactly such arrangements connect to the constitution of politics in former Soviet societies where semi-deliberate performative actions, “freiwillige rituelle Mitgestaltung symbolischer Inszenierungen” (Ursprung 2008: 155) were a regular procedure. Everyday life in the USSR required exactly this kind of participation at “Massenveranstaltungen und die regelmäßig geforderte aktive Zustimmung zum Regime” (ibid.:155). As a totalitarian state, the entire social system in the USSR was based on complicated mechanisms that required from each individual „immer wieder in ritualisierten Kontexten eine Äußerung für oder gegen das Regime“ (ibid.: 155). Such symbolic performances display and effectively strengthen the hegemonic narrative of the regime. Eventually, through consistent and active „Bejahung zur Herrschaft, die weder mit rein passiver Unterwerfung unter Zwang noch mit freiwilliger Beteiligung gleichgesetzt werden kann, ließ sich über die konkrete Ritualsituation hinaus eine soziale Ordnung konstituieren – Herrschaft eben“ (ibid.: 155f.).

Summary: Meshwork Governance and Epistemic Cultures

Conceptually the present research makes use of meshwork governance to understand political processes in the specific research region in rural Tajikistan. Meshwork governance arrangements build on different authorities and diverse normative systems that compete in decision making and implementation. Governance arrangements are inseparable from the presence and distribution of knowledge in society, i.e. knowledge and governance are considered coming into existence co-produced. Conceptually, the interlinkage of knowledge and governance is accomplished in the concept of epistemic cultures. Epistemic cultures determine “how we know what we know” (Knorr-Cetina 1999: 1); they help to stabilize political regimes, maintain the dominance of local elites and sustain the local social order.

The focus on co-produced epistemic cultures is used in the present research to understand how everyday life and livelihoods are ordered by various stocks of knowledge, governance arrangements and power interventions in different localities and sub-regions. Hence, the perspective of epistemic cultures allows analysing how knowledge assets such as agricultural expertise and knowledge practices evolve, are taken up and modified in rural societies.

3 Farm Restructuring and Transformation of Agricultural Knowledge

While the post-Soviet Republic of Tajikistan underwent severe political upheavals since independency in 1991, rural livelihoods and agricultural production experienced dynamic transformation processes, but economic stagnation too. This chapter outlines how post-Soviet land reforms and farm restructuration processes led to the individualization of agriculture. The chapter further looks into details of agricultural policy implementations. It illustrates how farm restructuration and individualization processes evolved according to the interests of national and local elites. These power structures determine today's setup of agricultural production and are different from authoritarian modernisation projects in neighbouring Central Asian states. The last part of the chapter describes how transformation processes have effect on epistemic cultures in rural Tajikistan, referring in particular on agricultural knowledge and information.

Privatisation, individualization or de-collectivization are key terms used to describe the efforts of agricultural restructuring throughout the post-Soviet states of Central Asia and the Caucasus, containing implicitly a development paradigm, namely the consent to establish capitalist, market-oriented, self-reliant rural farm entrepreneurs in a democratic political order. The collapse of the Soviet Union and related communist states in the late 1980's started a global transformation process of socialist inspired collective economies as Russia, Mongolia, Cuba, and China, assumingly towards the Western type market economies of the EU or the USA. However, in the Central Asian post-Soviet republics, despite the transition to capitalist market conditions the state continues to have significant economic leverage in rural areas, with the assumed development

aim ever more vague. Agriculture is in all Central Asian states of major concern for both, economy and society. About two thirds of the population live in rural areas and is occupied in agricultural economies, whereas on average “this sector makes up approximately 30% of state revenue” (Markowitz 2016: 519). Despite comparable starting points after the collapse of the USSR, post-Soviet nation-states embarked on different paths to restructure their agricultural sector (Spoor 2004).³⁸ The new Central Asian nation-states presented themselves committed to economic reforms to implement market economy in agricultural areas (Rozelle and Swinnen 2004; Spoor 2004).³⁹ Initially, Western analysts saw these policies as a logic outcome to compensate previous collective agriculture. “The Chinese and Vietnamese experiences led to the expectation that the new institutional rules introduced in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union would lead rural residents to defect *en masse* from inefficient collectivized farm organizations to more efficient, individually operated farms” (Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev 2017: 1). Underlying development assumptions of these reform processes refer to the strength of the capitalist market economy that attracts rural households to establish private farm enterprises which will eventually enhance productivity and production, thus ensure a livelihood from agricultural production.⁴⁰

³⁸ Farm restructuring implies “new forms of association, namely cooperatives, joint stock companies, partnerships, associations of peasant farms, private farmers and peasants” (Spoor 2004: 11).

³⁹ See strategic government papers as the Kazakhstan 2030 Government Development Programme.

⁴⁰ *Dehqon* farm is the term for a privatized farm enterprise. There are three different types: the individual, family or collective *dehqon* farm. The collective *dehqon* farm is usually the successor of former Kolkhoz/ Sovkhoz enterprise. At times of field research and at least until 2016, collective *dehqon* farms prevailed in the Zarafshan Valley. The individual *dehqon* farm denotes that the farm is bound to one single household. The family *dehqon* farm consists of a number of households who pool together their land and share spending and profits. The

In this view, economic development is founded in private property. Robinson et al. wrap up the paradigm that “strong user rights and liberalization are positively related to agricultural labour productivity in post-Soviet economies” (2008: 172) and provide in their Tajik case studies partial evidence for this view (Robinson et al. 2008: 200). The positive relation of individual property to business is widely accepted not only among scientists (Rizov 2004) but also NGO practitioners (Verdery 2004) and international donors as the World Bank or the European Union. Scholars as Lerman (2000, et al. 2002), Spoor (2004) and others lined out that agricultural restructuring in Eastern Europe and Central Asia and economic performance are directly related.

“These authors argue that Central Asian countries are amongst the worst performers and they link poor agricultural output to a high persistence of collective structures in which privatization has consisted simply of changing the sign on the door” (Robinson et al. 2008: 172).

Thus, while there is wide agreement among Western scholars and policy makers that the development paradigm of privatizing, de-collectivizing or individualizing former collective agricultural structures is having favourable effects on agricultural economy; on local level these processes unfold protracted and ambiguous. Post-Soviet dismantling of previous *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* structures and the successive distribution of land happened in all former Soviet republics (Lerman 2004). However implementation is diverse; post-Soviet Central Asian states bought differently into this development paradigm (Spoor 2007) with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan (Veldwisch and Bock 2011) as most cautiously, and Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Petrick and Pomfret 2016). Still, it is important to note

large-scale production cooperative as new form of the collective *dehqon* farm could not be retrieved in the Zarafshan Valley.

that also within the countries the implementation of land reforms has developed sub-regionally differently. Despite central reform legislation within the country, implementation and outcome of agricultural restructuring efforts have been in Tajikistan for example, sub-regionally highly diverse (Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev 2017; Robinson et al. 2008). While some structures were surely decollectivized, in the sense of “breaking up large cooperative and state farms into individual, autonomous farms” (Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev 2017: 1), others had changed only by name. The term decollectivization suggests the structured dismantling of collective farm structures, which was often not the case (ICG 2005; Tuychi 2014). Understanding post-Soviet change processes as form of privatization is equally problematic as only a very few of the emerging farm households were ready to enter a yet to emerge market economy. All land tenure remains with the state, allocated land use rights do not provide rural households with the same security as private property. Claiming the privatization of Central Asian rural economies is only punctually applicable and thus misleading as in large parts one cannot speak of a functioning market economy. For these reasons I denote the transformation process in rural Central Asia as agricultural individualization, which describes firstly an economic process, however includes a social, livelihood and knowledge dimension. The term agricultural individualization provides an open perspective and, as I will show throughout this book, adds a social dimension to the initially economic transformation process. The individualization of agriculture refers not just to economic rearrangements from collective to the household level, it includes also the social-administrative dimension that was fulfilled by *kolkhoz* structures, and importantly for this research, a cognitive-intellectual dimension of communal arrangement (Mielke and Schetter 2007).

The Individualization of the Tajik Agriculture

After the collapse of the USSR and the declaration of national independence in 1991, Tajikistan introduced a series of land reforms and agricultural support policies with the aim of transferring the collective farming system of *kolkhozes* and *sovkhoses*⁴¹ to individual agricultural production. While farmers started to defect from collective farms in Tajikistan already in the early 1990's without direct involvement of the state on local level (Roy 1999, 2007), only later the Tajik state attempted to steer the process with a series of agrarian reforms. Namely the 1992 *Law of the Republic of Tajikistan On Land Reforms* "aimed at the creation of equal rights for development of different forms of enterprises and at the rational use and protection of land in agricultural production" (Tuychi 2014: 129). Subsequently several laws regarding access to land and the restructuration of farm enterprises have come into existence since then with the intention to dissolve collective farm structure and individualize agricultural production (Nekbakhtshoev 2016; Sehring 2009; Tuychi 2014). However, implementation and outcome of land reform legislation in Tajikistan are sub-regionally highly diverse. Significant differences occurred between cotton and non-cotton areas or high and low land areas (Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev 2017; Robinson et al. 2008). Taking the dismantling of collective farms as indicator for the progress of individualization confirms vast differences throughout the Tajik sub-regions (Hofman and Visser 2014). In contrast, rather little research has been available about how land reform efforts actually unfolded in remote mountainous areas of Tajikistan (Bliss 2011, 2012; Kraudzun 2016; Kreutzmann 2002; Kreutzmann and Watanabe 2016; Mandler 2013, 2016).

⁴¹ *Kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* were the main types of farm enterprises in the former USSR. The names stand for the two main forms of state controlled collective farming.

Land Access Regulations

Until 1992 and beyond all relevant arable areas in Tajikistan were managed by Soviet collective farm structures (Giese 1970; Roy 1999), thanks to the 1992's law on land reform each employee [i.e. *kolkhoznik* or *sovkhoznik*] had a share of these collective farm assets (Porteous 2005).⁴² *Kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* structures ceased out and every member of the collective structures was entitled to a quota of land use rights (Republic of Tajikistan 1996).⁴³ This quota of land consisted usually of a set of land use rights, i.e. shares of irrigated land, unirrigated land, garden land and other kinds of land. Nevertheless, the "certificate listed only the names of the shareholders and the boundaries of the farm as a whole, and did not specify the location or the size of the shareholders' land shares" (Nekbakhtshoev 2016: 56).⁴⁴ The granted usage rights of land parcels made at the same time the farmer a stakeholder in the newly formed collective *dehqon* farm⁴⁵ enterprise (Robinson et al. 2008; Rowe 2010). Land use titles guarantee life-long inheritable tenure to individuals for household plots and *dehqon* farms (Duncan

⁴² Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev are defining a collective farm as any farm "where the majority of shareholders have only paper shares" (2017: 5).

⁴³ Due to the specific division of labour which organized *kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes*, this entailed that many of the farmers today were not farmers during Soviet times, but rather administrative employees, mechanics, drivers etc. Farmers were organized in collectives [brigade] specialized on certain agricultural tasks.

⁴⁴ Interestingly, in non-cotton areas of Tajikistan as the Zarafshan Valley, farmers had a very clear idea where these titles are located, and actually already used this land as their private property. As Nekbakhtshoev remarks, this was not everywhere in Tajikistan the case (2016: 51). Chapter seven shows that farmers in remote and marginal agricultural areas, despite being member in the collective *dehqon* farm, delimited precisely their land plots and individually worked their land.

⁴⁵ In the course of these early reforms many *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* structures split up along brigades and formed communal collective *dehqon* farms where previous command structures largely remained intact (Nekbakhtshoev 2016: 56). In cotton areas, working teams [*brigada*] were often maintained for a long time afterwards.

2000: 15f). These titles may be passed on to others but cannot be sold. Farmers are not allowed to trade land tenures what entails the nonexistence of a regular land market (Kandiyoti 2007; Van Atta 2008). The land code reads: "Land in the Republic of Tajikistan belongs to the exclusive ownership of the state".⁴⁶ This principle is founded in the Tajik constitution, which makes explicit that land is the endowment of the people and cannot be a marketable commodity.⁴⁷ Land use titles may be transferred to others (Caccavale 2005; Duncan 2000: 16f), are in itself not fully stable arrangements. Firstly, they may not determine a specific delimited piece of land. Secondly, it is comparably easy for authorities and rural elites to circumvent or neglect these rights. Empirical findings discussed below show that the various access arrangements to land are not stable. Land plots may be requested by other farmers, but also misappropriated by authorities (Mandler 2013: 15f). These scenarios are a permanent source of discontent for farmers, who take measures to safeguard present access arrangements.

Following the above 'privatization' mind-set, since 2006 the Tajik government launched a sequence of reform laws (Tuychi 2014)⁴⁸ and initiatives to promote farm households to defect from the communal collective *dehqon* farm, encouraging them to set-up so called individual or family *dehqon* farms. Individualized farm enterprises were displayed by the government as favourable to private entrepreneurship because they provide increased financial sustainability, release individual entrepreneurship, enhance the use

⁴⁶ Article 2, The Land Code of the Republic of Tajikistan, 1996. Retrieved 04/2014 available at: <http://cis-legislation.com/document.fwx?rgn=2150>

⁴⁷ This principle is formulated in article 13 of the Tajik constitution. Ideally, it is understood as care-taking of Tajik authorities of the non alienable properties of the people (private conversation with Zvi Lerman 2016).

⁴⁸ Tuychi provides a concise overview over the Tajik state reform efforts (2014: 129-36)

of agro-technology and stabilize the farm business.⁴⁹ Further, it enables farm households to secure existing land tenures through land certificates that may be used as collateral for bank loans. Once the district land committee has issued land use certificates, previous requests and laws may not be applied to the land plot any more (Caccavale 2005). On the basis of land certificates, individual or family *dehqon* farm can be established. Exactly these processes of farm restructuring unfolded differently throughout the Tajik sub-regions. Thus, Hierman and Nekbakhtshoev state that despite “the uniform standard by which local authorities were to implement centralized law, [...] rates of decollectivization were uneven across Tajikistan’s districts” (2017: 5). With the perspective on cotton-producing enterprises, the authors maintain that the “spatial variation in decollectivization patterns [is due to the] *de facto* devolution of decision making authority to local elites” (2017: 6), namely managers of the collective *dehqon* farms, who pursue their own agenda. In Tajik cotton areas, Nekbakhtshoev identifies decentralized land reform and land allocation processes (2016: 49) which are resisted by “Soviet rural elites-turned-managers” (2016: 18, 54, 62, 236f). Personal interests of local elites as farm managers surely helped to maintain collective farm structures also in remote and marginal agricultural areas, however I will argue in chapter six that for a long period it was also in the interest of smallholder farmers to remain within collective farm structures (Mandler 2016).⁵⁰ Albeit in non-cotton regions of Tajikistan the situation may be different. In the aftermath of the long history of Soviet collective farming in Tajikistan, relations between individual households and

⁴⁹ Nekbakhtshoev quotes the then governor of the Tajik Sughd province Qoodiiri (2016: 55).

⁵⁰ As I will be shown below at the example of the Zarafshan Valley, farmers produce individually on their own land plots, however remained members of the collective *dehqon* farms. This situation prevailed in the Zarafshan area until 2014 and beyond.

the collective farm included complex ties of economic, administrative, social and occasional character (Hann 2003).⁵¹ Deprived of substantial agricultural resources, the remaining communal collective *dehqon* farms were not able to continue the previous role of the former *kolkhoz* or *sovkhozes* (Herbers 2006; Roy 1999; Spoor 2007). But even in its' reduced form, the collective farms still had a central role in the community's daily affairs as a few structures and institutions as meetings, councils, health care or transport continued to exist for a certain period. Eventually, related to economic individualization processes emerged the reorganization of agricultural knowledge and its potential role in smallholder agricultural development. This development complies with land reform efforts in neighbouring post-Soviet countries. Only very few collective farms resisted the general trend of agricultural individualization and continued to work collectively in a meaningful way, i.e. working profitably and providing services for the community, as examples in Kazakhstan (Babadjanov 2014) and partially in Uzbekistan (Kandiyoti 2003; Trevisani 2011) show. Kirgizstan and Georgia instead followed an economically more liberal approach where collective farms were more quickly abandoned (Frey 2016; Lerman and Sedik 2009b).

Due to sub-regional differences of farm individualization processes, it is still very difficult to give a coherent picture of farm structures throughout Tajikistan. The continued existence of collective *dehqon* farms underlines sub-regional varieties. Against this background the individualization of agricultural farm structures appears as economic paradigm somewhat incomplete. On the one hand side individualization happened only partially. On the other side it resulted in unclear, ambiguous property and production conditions.

⁵¹ This corresponds with the conception of the *kolkhoz* as total social system in the late Soviet Union (Hann 2003, Trevisani 2010).

Arrangements of agricultural individualization turn out particularly ambivalent as these processes are strongly influenced by the state policies of limited access orders, which exacerbate the competition for arable land. Thus, the term individualization does not describe a somewhat linear capitalist transition from collective farms to private household farming (Lerman and Sedik 2009c). Instead, it actually describes waves of agricultural policy conditions that allowed or coerced farmer to enlarge individual production. In remote areas individualization denotes mostly unsystematic farm restructuring, where farmers defected sporadically from collective enterprises by organizing access to agricultural resources without accordance to legal frameworks and pursuing individual livelihoods.

Meshwork Governance and Competition of Local Stakeholders

Local elites in Tajik rural areas are not a homogenous group. There are at least three different types of elites in rural Tajikistan, which overlap as well: Economic elites that focus on production and commercialization, political elites that build on exclusive access to powerful networks and, religious elites such as mullahs or rural dwellers with a particular pious lifestyle. Elites draw authority and reputation from their capacity to mobilize or intimidate co-villagers. Political elites dispose of privileged links to the state administration and ‘power organs’ [Machtorgane].⁵² Such capacities enable these rural dwellers to establish a form of coerced-solidarity [Zwangssolidarität] of they rural community with the state, using real or symbolic mobilization of power and wealth to stigmatize, intimidate and to marginalize potential dissenters. Through

⁵² The so called ‘power organs’ [Russ. *organy vlasti*] or power authorities are in common Tajik understanding the army, the secret service GKNB and the police. The Tajik State Committee for National Security (GKNB), the successor agency of the Soviet KGB, is still commonly referred to simply as KGB.

ritualized narratives and references to the president and the founding myths of the state, local elites claim loyalty with the state system; presenting themselves as guardians of peace, political stability and justice in rural areas. Several authors note, the *status quo* (Boboyorov 2013a: 14) or the legitimate order (Heathershaw 2009: 68, 73) is determined through a terminology of value conceptions for instance as “*tinji* [well, peaceful, stable, calm] and *notinji* [unstable, political tension]” (Roche 2013: 27) that discredits any criticism as opposition to the local way of living and to the state. Ritualized reference to values and certain national narratives promoted by elites have taken characteristics of an ideology that monopolizes social identities and impedes alternative conceptualisations of reality, be it religiously or politically (Harris 1998, 2012; Stephan 2010). Critic to cases of injustice, inequality or corruption is quickly denounced as disturbing the peace within the village. References to stability and *tinji* are therefore no value free statements (Heathershaw 2009: 73).⁵³ The example of *tinji* shows how elites denote full political affirmation and seek to disperse discontent among villagers or regarding authorities (Epkenhans 2012; Heathershaw 2009: 72f). Boboyorov explains convincingly how the repeated reference to an assumed common identity and local customs is mobilized by local elites to subvert smallholder villagers (2013a: 134ff).

The above paragraphs have shown some general lines how post-Soviet individualization of agriculture unfolded in Tajikistan. The

⁵³ Stability is an often used term in Tajik media, development discourses and on local level (Boboyorov 2013:14); the topos belongs in fact to the rhetoric of the government. Stability, as also reflected in the concept of peace [*tinji*], means cementing inequality, corruption etc. Stability and *tinji* are therefore hardly value free terminology. Such references to local identity and common order eventually serve to sideline and intimidate any critic of the existing conditions. Thus, the reference to such topoi is a governance mechanism (Lemon 2016a). I will further elaborate on such practices in the empirical chapters below.

following sub-chapter refers to paradigms of Tajik and Central Asian governance processes grasped as political economy, which Dudoignon described tellingly hovering from “ambiguity to ambivalence” (2004). Dudoignon’s formulation summarizes the conduct of political actors in Tajik rural areas, i.e. how political forces affect the choice of economic policies. Governance in Central Asia’s rural areas appears largely non-democratic decision making and neopatrimonial authoritarian policy implementation (Sehring 2009: 85f). The broad view on the political economy of agricultural policies in post-Soviet states aims to describe motivations, modus and impact of actors towards law, custom, and government that frame the logic and paradigms of agricultural restructuring (Petrick and Pomfret 2016). Despite a quarter century of national independence, leadership in the five Central Asian republics follows a post-Soviet design (Van Assche et al. 2014), which is different to neighbouring Islamic states such as Pakistan or Afghanistan (Mielke 2012; Schetter 2007). On local level, governance parallels between the Islamic republics and post-Soviet states become increasingly visible, i.e. through references to shari’ah or the expulsion of females of the public sphere (Schetter 2009, 2013a, 2013b). However, policies in Central Asian republics, i.e. agricultural policies, are still dominated by social and political paradigms that prevail within the institutional and behavioural patterns of Soviet societies:

“[P]ost-Soviet states share important similarities. One similarity is very strong executives. [P]ost-Soviet leaders inherited populations with restricted choice sets and all the national symbols of state authority, including a time-tested party system to manage the aspirations of talented elites, uniforms and statue-lined streets for parades, museums and archives, a school system for the education of children, a national television network, and much more. Across most of

post-Soviet Eurasia, self-reinforcing processes of single-party hegemonic stability were unleashed once the chaos of the transition subsided and the electricity was turned back on. Rural votes could be traded for access to scarce public goods. [Neutralizing] the risk of insurgency from the internal hinterlands [...] with ritual elections, occasional violence, and constant surveillance. Potemkin institution-building in the capitals was paired with a return to Soviet vote-farming in rural areas. Strong presidents, in this account, emerged via a path-dependent logic to take the place of Party Secretaries” (Driscoll 2015: 125f)

Driscoll outlines major features of post-Soviet republics in Central Asia, pointing for instance at very strong executives under strong national presidents. With exception of Kirgizstan, presidents in Central Asian states have assumed de facto extra-legal positions, employing national founding mythologies that link to particular periods in pre-Soviet history. In analogy to communist cult of personality, authoritarian rulers are displayed as enlightened patriarchs, labelled by simulated democratic institutions as “father of the nation” (Soest and Grauvogel 2015: 19). Soest and Grauvogel (2015) present a set of six dimensions of legitimacy claims that are employed by post-Soviet authoritarian regimes.⁵⁴ Despite different degrees of authoritarianism in the Central Asian republics, the personal figure of the president is a pre-condition that steadily gains weight in determining national policies. Besides Kirgizstan, the presidents of the Central Asian republics have virtually unlimited terms and are hardly accountable to democratic checks and

⁵⁴ Soest and Grauvogel (2015: 6f) identify six dimensions of how states claim legitimacy: (1) ideology, (2) foundational myth, (3) personalism, (4) international engagement, (5) procedural mechanisms, and (6) performance (i.e. claims to success in producing desirable political, social, or economic outcomes).

balances from parliaments or other institutions of the state (Markowitz 2013; Reeves et al. 2014). Strong leaders preside over weak state institutions, so that *de facto* the figure of the president symbolically and physically overlays the government and the state. This phenomenon has long been discussed in the context of the question if Central Asian republics are strong or weak states (Heathershaw 2014; Heathershaw and Schatz 2017; Meagher 2012). Former Soviet republics were perceived as hybrid states, where the government is not adequately present in certain policy sectors, nor in rural areas (Koehler and Zürcher 2004; Zürcher 2005). Highly centralized post-Soviet state structures are strong in security and economic sectors, while absent in others, such as guaranteeing civil rights, jurisdiction, economic policies or providing basic services e.g. health, infrastructure or education. Selective stateness is particularly evident in rural areas (Trevisani 2011). Laruelle speaks of multiple and regular contradictory logics that “signal the core instability of these regimes and their hybridity” (2012: 321). Despite strong leaders, Central Asian states have difficulties to implement agricultural policies in the periphery or guarantee civil rights (Reeves 2014). It is this “intrinsic ambiguity of (Central Asian) post-colonial state formation which produces paradoxes such as 'strong-weak' states” (Heathershaw 2009: 142). In selected areas as security, internal politics or parts of the economy the state is through its agencies (‘power actors’ and the administration) and external allies (international partners) a strong player. However, in some central sectors, governmental competences migrated to other agencies and actors, what has been perceived as “state fragmentation” (McGlinchey 2014), “state failure” (ICG 2009, 2011) or “state erosion” (Markowitz 2013). Nevertheless, over the course of the past 25 years, Central Asian states and their leadership have proved very resilient against crisis. Within this setting, democratic

processes in a Western sense are the exception. People have very little possibilities to participate in political processes.⁵⁵ This is much criticized from a Western perspective which continues to identify “democratic deficits” (Soest and Grauvogel 2015: 5) of increasingly authoritarian ‘regimes’ (ICG 2011; Lemon 2016b).⁵⁶ In contrast to Western democracies, post-Soviet states in the European periphery present themselves as alternative democracies, for instance in analogy to the Russian “sovereign democracy” (Brusis 2016)⁵⁷ i.e. idealized as advanced version of presidential democracy. Schematic and value-laden comparisons with Western democracies appear of little conceptual use as they develop insufficient explanatory power. I argue that governance processes in the post-Soviet realm of eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia are not a deviation from Western models but conceptually different.⁵⁸ Significant differences result from the authoritarian leadership of the president and his allies, interlinked with the profound ambiguity between strong and weak, i.e. selective, governance, which is a key characteristic of governance in post-Soviet areas. The situation results from either retreat or incapacity to govern major political fields. Many governmental competences are delegated to other agencies and actors. For the cases of Georgia and Tajikistan, Driscoll explains why

⁵⁵ Democratic processes are manipulated by rigged elections, outlawing of political opposition and the complicated, if any, transition of power between political competitors.

⁵⁶ Indicators of authoritarian regimes are the selective absence of public sphere, simulated democratic representations, the lack of real checks of the political system, the repression of opposition politics. Compare with chapter four.

⁵⁷ The term ‘sovereign democracy’ is opposed to the idea of ‘liberal democracy’, intending to distance one-self to the transatlantic-European model of democracy is, in analogy to Russia, reason of state (Staatsräson) in some of the post-Soviet states (Brusis 2016).

⁵⁸ There is not one Western governance model as there is no Eastern governance deficit. The intention here is to show that against Western dominated perspectives on governance, there are general features and practices that differ between east and west.

large parts of state domains are ruled in form of power sharing in order to keep the president at its position (2015). Effectively, such virtual power arrangements between warlords and other political actors enforce the authoritative organization of everyday life (Donahue 2002: 1), although at the cost of civic participation in state affairs. State authority is shared almost at every level, not necessarily with institutions, but with powerful actors, who follow their own agenda (Driscoll 2015; Wiegmann 2009). Manipulating or co-opting single actors allows the government and namely the president to rule at the centre of the state, determining state politics. State authority is intrinsically tied to the personality of the president (Driscoll 2015: 125, 129f). Critics or political opposition to the president means in this context going against the state. Despite the façade of democratic parliamentary institutions and pledges of leaders for enhancing democracy, governance at state level and down to sub-districts is deeply authoritarian.⁵⁹ This particular phenomenon is prevalent in all post-Soviet Central Asian states – with the modest exception of Kyrgyzstan. In the public sphere, the president substitutes the state, indicating that those areas which are not close to the president are somewhat without the state. State governance processes in the post-Soviet republics typically rely on tight control of the public sphere and communication through the state administration. Driscoll quotes Kotkin's *bon mot* that the "various post-Soviet nations emerged deeply Soviet" (In: Driscoll 2015: 125). Especially in rural areas, governance arrangements of everyday life are characterized by uncertainty and poor rule of law, occasionally interrupted by abrupt and powerful interventions of local elites or authorities (Kropp and Schuhmann 2014: 63f).

⁵⁹ Heathershaw speaks with regard to Tajikistan of the "simulation of 'democratisation', 'opposition' and 'multiparty politics'" (2009: 94).

Neopatrimonial Authoritarian Leadership: The Role of the President

As a consequence, most post-Soviet states in Central Asia are characterized as neopatrimonial as all important decisions require the consent of the president (Ishiyama 2004: 43f; Laruelle 2012; Paiziev 2014). Departing from Weber's considerations regarding patrimonialism and legal-rational bureaucracy (1978 [1968], 1980), Erdman and Engel define neopatrimonialism as a "type of political domination which is characterised by insecurity about the behaviour and role of state institutions (and agents). This insecurity structures the reproduction of the system" (2006: 19). While Erdman and Engel build their concept on findings from Sub-Saharan countries in Africa, this holds true for post-Soviet states in Central Asia and the Caucasus too. Laruelle describes the specific forms of neopatrimonialism in Central Asia as patronal presidentialism that is built on far-reaching patronage systems, designing, moderating and manipulating the various power-fractions within the country (2012: 316). The notion of the neopatrimonial state indicates authoritarian leadership in rural areas presenting itself as force of stability in a context of insecurity. Markowitz elaborates on the case of Uzbekistan how "neopatrimonial relationships within the state's territorial administration support the rise and institutionalization of authoritarian rule" (2012: 1) and argues that in consequence this "halts political and economic reform, undermines the rule of law, and diminishes social welfare provision to the public" (2012: 1). Patronage networks link local elites with the central government, a relation which ideally constitutes mutual authority. On local level patronage networks provide security, trust and predictability, collective identities are the outer layer of these patterns of institutionalized order, as argues Boboyorov (2012, 2013a). They are possibly reaching from very high up in state structures down to

small villages. Such vertical relations entail that unsolved political issues at national level, for instance regarding agricultural sector development, the relation of the state to Islam, or the definition of national security have an immediate impact on local affairs. Authoritarian rulers in rural areas potentially conflict with the state building efforts of the central state, as they consider rural areas as personal fiefdom that is governed and exploited with little limitations or control (Heathershaw 2009; Wiegmann 2009).⁶⁰ Driscoll elaborates on the example of Georgia and Tajikistan how national leaders rule through a semi-orderly high-risk “coalition game” (2015: 30f), where the presidents carefully manoeuvre between the various power fraction in the country and distribute available assets to remain in charge. Authoritarian leadership in Tajikistan is a case in point for the post-Soviet neopatrimonial regime. The state is highly centralized under the authoritarian leadership of President Emomali Rahmon,⁶¹ who is displayed as “Founder of Peace and Harmony: Leader of the Nation” and together with his family absolved from possible application of national legislation (RFE/RL Tajik Service 2015), in order to rebuild the Tajik nation as renewal of the Samanid emirate (Soest and Grauvogel 2015: 18). However, despite the historical mission of the president to link with mythological ancestors, everyday politics show the selective capacities of the state to rule over provinces or to address pressing political issues as the economy, rule of law, education and health care. The cases of apparent administrative incapacity are used by the government to underline the need of

⁶⁰ Schetter notes in Taliban dominated regions of Afghanistan the re-strengthening of local powers: “Wiederkehr lokaler Herrschaftsansprüche, lokale Kommandeure, Verteidigung des Lokalen” (2007: 236f.)

⁶¹ *De facto* the Tajik president commands significant resources of power as the general state apparatus (Heathershaw 2009: 145). The president exercises power in particular through the control of the power organs [Russ. *organy vlasti*]: Army, secret service and the police.

authoritarian competences to extent the state power over the country and thus secure development efforts. The narrative of 'catching up' allowed, for instance, Tajikistan for a long time to "maintain the appearance of being 'on the road to democracy'" (Heathershaw 2009: 113) and attract the assistance of foreign donors, which again is a resource of power exclusive to the president (Driscoll 2015; Heathershaw 2009; Zürcher 2005). Thus, the president is not only symbolically in the centre of the state, but a guarantor for the political and economic existence of the state. The patronizing figure of the president carefully employs a strategy to rule (Herrschaftsstrategie) based on the narrative of being saviour of the nation,⁶² while actually limiting and discrediting democratic processes (Heathershaw 2009: 93, 171). In fact, the "political process is closed to all who might challenge [President] Rahmon" (ICG 2016: 2,13). For Heathershaw, this belongs to a process of state building based on "emergent, legitimate and post-conflict order" which is in fact "*authority*" (2009: 109). Thus, authoritarian policy making legitimates itself on the basis of its emendation from the leader. Consequently, the president and the Tajik government have stepped up in recent years their tendency to authoritarian decision making and the use of violence to silence secular and religious opponents (Lemon 2016a).⁶³

⁶² The president presents himself in public as peace-maker of the Tajik civil war from 1992 – 1997, which he brokered as one of the leaders of the winning military coalition (Driscoll 2015).

⁶³ In recent years several severe violent clashes between government forces and renegades from the regime happened, e.g. 2010 in the Kamarob Gorge, 2012 and 2014 in Khorog, 2015 in Dushanbe and the Romit Gorge.

Agricultural Information, Advice and Expertise in Rural Tajikistan

Currently available agricultural information and specific expertise developed in parallel to the rural transformation processes in post-Soviet Tajikistan. Previous Soviet structures that produced and disseminated agricultural expertise were well developed in Tajikistan, with outreach also to remote collective farms (Dudoignon and Noack 2014; Herbers 2006). Since Tajik national independence, many of the institutional networks between local experts, research organizations, administration and policy makers have ceased to exist (Shtaltovna and Mandler 2012). Other networks crossing the boundaries of agricultural production have come into place. Despite the protracted individualization of agricultural structures, production was in fact since long time an individual task and so the approach to agriculturally relevant knowledge (Hornidge et al. 2016). Thus, with regard to agricultural knowledge, new sources and networks have developed which may not be as efficient as the former centralized structures, however work under the conditions of a fragile private market system. Referring to the post-Soviet states, Van Den Ban stated a “consequence is that agricultural extension and other forms of adult education have a more important role to play in [...former communist] countries than elsewhere in the world” (1999: 121). Agricultural production is a knowledge intense activity. According to Roeling, farmers rely on an agricultural knowledge system (1994) through which rural actors commune in order to solve problems or release innovations (Leeuwis 2004). There is widespread evidence for the delicacy of agricultural production regarding limitations of the agricultural knowledge system (Foss 2007; Lemma 2007; Wall 2006). In return, it is commonly agreed that production is stimulated by incentives for education and knowledge exchange (Evers et al. 2006; Evers 2008;

Roeling 1994; Roeling and Wagemakers 1998). Agricultural extension or advisory services are understood as “promoting agricultural productivity, increasing food security, improving rural livelihoods, and promoting agriculture as an engine of pro-poor economic growth” (IFPRI 2016). This means, particular assets of knowledge are believed to positively influence agricultural production, such as scientific expertise, so called best practices or economic advice. Research and advice are perceived as potential boost to the agricultural production, especially in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus where it is assumed to trigger economic development (CACAARI 2009; IMF 2009; Wason 2002).

Agricultural Expertise and Advice in Post-Soviet Agriculture

The former Soviet republics in Central Asia have a collective history of rural centralized agricultural advisory services, which were hierarchically structured throughout the entire Soviet Union. Specific agricultural expertise was channelled to *kolkhozes* and *sovkhoses* through local and regional departments of the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). Every *kolkhoz* or *sovkhos* had a set of trained experts available, consisting of engineers, agronomists, accountants who regularly attended courses to update their knowledge. Furthermore, the chief of the collective farm [*raísi hodshagi dehqonon*] was closely integrated in Soviet power structures, e.g. through sub-regional party and government structures (Frey 2016; Shtaltovna 2016). The elaborated and extensive knowledge system of the former collective farming systems however deteriorated almost immediately with the end of the Soviet Union (Morgounov and Zuidema 2001), especially those institutions which were funded directly by Moscow (Van Assche 2016: 35). The centralized exchange of agricultural expertise ended gradually with the collapse

of the *kolkhoz* and *sovkhos* farming system in early 1990s, although with different speed in the various sub-regions. The USSR-wide established networks of education and research dissolved rather early after the political independence of the former Soviet republics, as the newly independent states faced the challenge to provide subsidies to these entities (Beniwal et al. 2010). Eventually, during the following individualization processes large parts of the Soviet collective agricultural infrastructure and knowledge system became out of use. Agricultural expert knowledge that was integrated in Soviet research structures, is either lost or became outdated (Evers and Wall 2006; Morgounov and Zuidema 2001), with research activity drastically shortened (Beniwal et al. 2010). In absence of new intellectual input, the remains of the Soviet knowledge system, such as routines and staff mentality form in some areas the basis of current cultivation praxis that often has not changed much. This applies especially to cotton regions, as this is the sector where states still exercise most control (ICG 2005; Van Atta 2008; Wall 2006). In cotton areas, farmers were bound, and partially still are, to crop quotas, particular production techniques, predefined input supplies and marketing mechanisms (Bliss 2008; Boboyorov 2016; Van Atta 2008). The Tajik cotton areas are only one example where the Soviet paradigm of dealing centrally, collective and very hierarchically with agricultural knowledge still prevails. This continuity in the way how agricultural knowledge is available is sensible in many other areas of the Tajik agricultural sector due to institutional path dependencies as pseudo-individualized farms and the persistence of leadership structures that link with authoritarian state structures. Still, the Tajik state maintains important research structures, as the Academy of Agricultural Sciences in Dushanbe or agricultural departments at provincial and district level [so called *agroprom*]. However, these

organizations are usually underfunded and lack expertise as a result of elite job-sales, so that they are hardly fit for the task to advise individualized farmers. Nevertheless, the Tajik government maintains its approach to enlarge and strengthen the role of agricultural advice as part of its long term agricultural reform commitments.⁶⁴ These programmes and institutions are often invisible in rural areas (Engel and Simonetti-Techert 2015: 4). While the MoA in Dushanbe is considered to have a two staff extension department (Van Atta 2014), this situation repeats on provincial and district administrative levels. District heads of *agroprom* do not foster the systematic dissemination of specialized agricultural advice (Mandler 2016), but follow a Soviet style “top-down approach, try to impose their views and objectives on local actors and are mainly interested in just controlling and reporting” (De Danieli and Shtaltovna 2016: 163). This attitude is the continuation of the Soviet knowledge paradigm, apparently disengaged with parallel individualization processes in the Tajik agriculture. Still, it is appropriate to state that there is currently no overriding national organization that provides agricultural advice to farmers (Shtaltovna 2016: 37). Shtaltovna and Danieli identify from the side of the Tajik government “little interest in a general development strategy for rural areas or in some form of reinvention of the agricultural expertise system” (2016: 167). Agricultural expertise in Tajikistan is currently not hierarchically pooled in central organizations on national or provincial level. Instead, central sources of knowledge are locally attached to individuals or minor structures with little

⁶⁴ Some central statements of the Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Tajikistan (MoA): MoA and the Tajik Academy of Agricultural Sciences *Agricultural Reform Program in Tajikistan for 2010-2020*, Dushanbe 2010; *Consolidated Document Agriculture Reform Programme of Republic of Tajikistan*, Dushanbe 2011; *Programme for reforming the Agriculture Sector of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2012-2020*, Dushanbe 2012; *Land Code Of The Republic Of Tajikistan*, Dushanbe 2012.

coordination and exchange among each other. These can be individuals, local farmer associations, external NGO, and state organizations as the district agricultural department *agroprom*. As a consequence of the above situation, each farming household is constrained to develop its own approach to access the required agricultural expertise (Mandler 2013). Against the background of deteriorated state support for agricultural research and advice, as well as massive social change in rural areas, the respective expertise comes with difficulties to local farmers. The existing gap in accessing agricultural advice cannot be easily substituted by external parties as NGOs, because “the farmer as a funnel for Western expertise, or as a central learning point for the modification and later implementation of such expertise, in general does not yet exist in Tajikistan” (Shtaltovna 2016: 30; Van Assche et al. 2013). Discussing agriculturally relevant knowledge in Tajik rural areas simply in terms of extension or agricultural advisory services would therefore be short-sighted. Especially under the conditions of LAO, smallholder farming decisions need to take the broader economic and political context into account. Unlike in previous collective structures, the head of household is in charge of farming decisions and has to fulfil complex tasks that developed gradually with the post-Soviet economic and political transition towards a capitalist market economy: “To be a farmer in Tajikistan today, one needs to be a multifunctional entrepreneur with specific agricultural knowledge as well as financial and legal skills, marketing skills and the ability to source all the required inputs and machinery” (Shtaltovna 2016: 30). Such challenges impact even more on the many female headed households.

Individualized Approaches to Expertise and Advice

In fact, the transformation towards new domains of knowledge accelerated in response to the change of the production system

(Kandiyoti 2003). With poor state advisory systems in place, there is a plurality of sub-regional different providers of agricultural advice. Although De Danieli and Shtaltovna see “farmers’ main sources of knowledge are state agronomists from Agroprom [*agroprom*] or former *kolkhoz* specialists” (2016: 163), I emphasize local forms of knowledge exchange and mutual consultation, thus specific knowledge structures and practices that developed on village level around local resource persons. Such persons may be former *kolkhoz* specialists; however as I will outline in the empirical chapters below, often these persons are experienced farmers of advanced years and maturity and are usually the first contact person for agricultural advice. Namely agricultural expertise is not alone the domain of centralized, professional experts, but has always been the prerogative of local farmers themselves (El-Berr 2009). One prime effect of the collapse of the collective farming system is therefore the reinforced concentration on expertise and advice available on local level. Farmers reverse themselves to experts and experienced farmers within their community who are subject-matter specialists despite being often without formal education. With regard to the high-mountainous parts of Tajikistan Bliss talks of a revival of local expertise in the process of de-collectivisation (2006). Similar consequences of agricultural individualization processes are also traceable elsewhere in the region of Uzbekistan as Kandiyoti outlines (2003: 251). These examples make evident that sub-regional different cultures of agricultural knowledge are being established that lack the link to central expertise. Agricultural restructuration processes have established a plurality of sources for agricultural information and advice that are from the perspective of individual farmers coequal; farmers opt for the various sources individually and case wise. With regard to the previous collectivized system, this appears as new paradigm regarding agricultural

knowledge. Despite the diverging local conditions throughout Tajikistan, farmers potentially can refer to a few main strands to gain agricultural information and advice from beyond village level. Firstly, rudimentary state advisory structures exist attached to provincial, district [*hukumat*] and sometimes sub-district [*jamoat*] level. The already mentioned district agricultural departments [*agroprom*] dispose very few personnel and financial resources. Therefore these offices do “not deliver proper advisory services to farmers. The main reason for that is their expertise is outdated and does not always meet present-day farmers’ needs” (De Danieli and Shtaltovna 2016: 163). Officers provide unpaid advice, but often sporadically and on individual basis (Bliss 2012; Mandler 2016: 342). However, despite the poor endowment, these offices are for many farmers a fixed point of reference. Higher structures as the MoA, the Tajik Academy of Agricultural Science or universities only sporadically fulfil their role of providing technical expertise. To make matters worse, since the end of the Soviet Union, these institutions have not adjusted to a mentality that serves the interests and needs of agricultural experts and farmers.

Thus, from the side of the government of Tajikistan no priority is scheduled to specialized information or economic assistance for farmers. International consulting and agricultural extension services through NGOs and international organizations partially fill this gap. They are significant sources for agricultural advice and services in Tajikistan. NGO advisory services are usually provided through long and short term development projects (De Danieli and Shtaltovna 2016: 164f). In many cases these efforts are implemented together with local Tajik NGOs (WFP 2005). The discontinuity of assistance programmes and projects in this realm creates not only short-sighted results, but raises also little expectations on the side of the clients. Mismatch of services and requests explains why agricultural

advisory services work with little effect, at times disdained by farmers (MEDA 2006). Surveys among farmer reveal that the quality of the provided services is an issue (Bakozoda et al. 2011; Welthungerhilfe 2006). Farmers request timely answers to specific questions, which may not be provided by the extension services available (Engel and Simonetti-Techert 2015: 5; Shtaltovna 2016). Mobile internet is increasingly available through telephones but it too lacks relevant services and information packages tailored for smallholder farmers. Especially in remote areas, missing links to markets as potential service and knowledge providers is a central issue (Giuliani et al. 2011).

Intersection: Media in Rural Tajikistan

The significant deterioration of the general infrastructure since 1991 was a major blow to the inter-regional information flow in Tajikistan. Media, as cornerstone of public communication, is poorly present in rural areas (Bensmann 2007; Wason 2002). Apart from infrastructural and economic limitations, media in rural Tajikistan faces harsh political restrictions. Due to potential intimidation and lack of resources media outlets are only sporadic capable to cover agricultural issues (Loersch and Grigorian 2000; NANSMIT 2009). Media outlets are under tight control of the government and used as centralized domains to exercise power. Driscoll gives an account how “centralized radio and television network, broadcasting a single narrative from the titular capitals” are crucial “compliance-generating technologies” (Driscoll 2015: 125) effectively employed in rural areas to corroborate and transmit state power.

“A mass reception of the same narratives in the same language at the same time – watching the same television serials as they air, hearing the president speaking on the radio, or downloading the same “Internet memes” – is a modern national ritual [...]. In social science jargon, one could say that public and synchronized mass communication technologies lower the cost for political leaders to create ‘common knowledge’[...]. I recall being in the rural village of Kalikhum when the lights were turned on for the first time in months, in concordance with the springtime Navruz holiday. The national television channel played songs of peace, and Rakhmonov’s face was plastered on the screen. I knew that if it were not for that man, the lights would still be off, and I knew that my host family understood this in the same way” (Driscoll 2015: 125).

While the media has a clear function for the state, it is weak with regard to agricultural or rural matters, it do not serve as a source for information: “There are different newspapers and journals for farmers as *Kishovarsi* [agriculture], *Xaeti dehot* [rural live], *Gasetta agroinform* [agrarian information newspaper], *Journal kishovars*

[agricultural journal], *Kishlok xodshalegi* [rural agricultural economy], but they hardly operate” (Dushanbe 25.07.2011). The funding of such publications comes from the ministry of agriculture (MoA) or the provincial government, however they are published sporadically. In fact, these publications were untraceable either in the cities or in villages of the Zarafshan Valley, and couldn’t even be found elsewhere in Tajikistan. Nevertheless, a few issues of the newspaper *Zarafshon* that dedicates three pages of information to agriculture were found in Panjakent. According to the district agricultural department [*agroprom*] in Panjakent, farmers of this district are informed with the weekly journal *Riskofarin* about agriculture in the region (Panjakent 08.08.2011). Yet, during field research, this weekly newspaper has never been seen outside the *agroprom*’s office and was unknown in other visited offices and among farmers. Despite the scarce availability, newspapers are sources of information for farming technologies and provide, also by omitting information, general information on agricultural policies. Farmers were invited to read newspapers at the head office of the collective *dehqon* farm. Collective *dehqon* farms are usually advised by authorities to hold subscriptions of the governmental newspapers *Cumhuriat* or *Minbari Xalk* (Dushanbe 19.07.2011). On enquiry, farmers repeatedly complained that the quality of reporting on agricultural politics and technical issues in the available newspapers is very poor. Education of journalists is low; there are very few who have the capacity to cover agricultural issues. Radio and TV are said to produce even worse broadcasts in this regard. Still, “freedom of the media today is much better than some years ago” says the expert of the NGO NANSMIT.

“But media coverage of agriculture is low. Journalists are badly trained, not specialized for agricultural issues and have no funds to travel out of the city. They hardly go into detail and also do not bother some big guys, who defend their monopoly of something. Journalists do not ask

further [investigative, A.M.] questions, they simply repeat general topics and strategies provided by the ministry of agriculture. Therefore their articles and information have official character” (Dushanbe 19.11.2011).

Some of the better off farmers who were regularly buying and sharing newspapers reported the limited access to print media. They are obliged to content themselves with the press available in rural areas, which are usually newspapers close to the government.

“Newspapers are generally too expensive. The newspaper AsiaPlus costs here about 2,5 Somoni [0,39 €]. I have to buy it in the city; but the issue is at least one day delayed. General newspapers do write about agriculture but not detailed enough. Take the example of potatoes in Tavildara district: Prices, diseases, cultivation techniques were not mentioned. There is no precision in reporting such topics” (Garibak 15.07.2011).

Considering the affirmative reporting, without critical cross-checking of statements or independent displaying of data, it appears that the state is heavily involved in agriculture and the display of agriculture in public. Farmers, however, are cut off from climatic information, ongoing political or economic developments. This results in limited public debate about agricultural production and its future development. It has thus negative impacts as agricultural expertise further outdates and potential investments are stalled.

Summary: Obstacles to Individualized Expertise

Tajik individual farmers face a complex scenario of potential sources for agricultural knowledge, information and advice. From a Western perspective, the assumed positive economic nexus between knowledge and innovation is challenged by the complex Tajik political economy. Difficulties for individual farmers derive from neopatrimonial authoritarian governance and policy making that corresponds with established limited access orders LAO. Unlike Western extension systems, which assume the ideal case of farmers' free choice regarding their farm practices (Röling 1994), farming innovations may easily become problematic in rural Tajikistan. State organizations and powerful local actors, both, monitor farmers closely economically and politically. For example, in Tajik cotton areas this led to forms of knowledge governance, with decidedly negative incentives for innovation (Wall 2006, Herbers 2006a, ICG 2005).⁶⁵ In fact, agricultural expertise is competing with other knowledge and third party interference, which creates manifold obstacles for extension measures, diminishes its effectiveness up to complete failure. These challenges source in the general political economy with e.g. interferences in the public sphere and domains of knowledge production alike (Amsler 2007: 2, 148). Similarly argues Van Assche who underlines that in the post-Soviet states of Central Asia and the Caucasus specific agricultural knowledge cannot be separated from general dispositions of power and is unthinkable independent from governance (2016). This prescribes the framing of rural epistemic cultures as authorities continue to declare certain areas suitable to

⁶⁵ It has been touched upon several times before that the conditions for agriculture change significantly between cotton and non-cotton areas. Outside cotton areas extension services have a bigger role to play as the influence of local governance on cropping and marketing patterns is lower (Boboyorov 2015; Wiegmann 2009).

particular crops, i.e. cotton or potatoes, thus considering alternative production systems is implicitly and explicitly prevented. LAO conditions create a situation that determines the exchange of knowledge and information and therewith schedules the implementation of innovations. Incentives for Tajik farmers to approach information and advisory services are therefore limited, as they experience the obstacles in making use of new knowledge, up to the point of deliberately abandoning market-oriented production (De Danieli and Shtaltovna 2016: 172). In consequence, farmers develop a critical and selective approach to information and knowledge, starting with the differentiation between local or external expertise.

4 *Research Questions, Hypothesis and Methodology*

Following up the conceptual considerations that frame Tajikistan a neopatrimonial authoritarian state and its agricultural sector structured by limited access orders LAO, the present study departs from a perspective on the nexus of co-produced knowledge and governance arrangements to scrutinize the role of expertise in the Tajik agricultural sector. The research evolves along three sets of questions that guide the analysis. The first question examines the individualization of agriculture as process of social fragmentation. Agricultural transformation in Tajikistan, e.g. farm restructuring and market economy, had significant impact on agricultural production, livelihoods and the cohabitation in rural communities alike. Previously powerful local institutions, state authorities, organizations and processes that determined policy-making (Politikgestaltung) on local level gave way to other normative systems designed by new elites, an emerging post-Soviet state ideology and the public understanding of Islam. These parameters significantly delimitate the room for manoeuvre of farmers by imposing new practices and rules as for instance through LAO. The research therefore asks: ***To what extent do farmers approach agriculture individually and how do they act together? How can farmers participate in political processes on local and sub-regional level?***

The second question asks why despite precarious livelihood situations in rural areas the individualization of the Tajik agriculture did not release a surge of innovation and productivity. The present situation of stagnating smallholder agriculture perpetuates rural poverty and fails to stimulate economic potentials. Limited natural resources combined with little political representation created

obstacles that reduce the potential of agricultural development. In this context, individualized smallholder farmers were expected to turn to agricultural information and advice as incentive for establishing intensified production. The research fathoms thus the role of agricultural expertise especially among smallholder farmers in remote rural areas: ***How is the development of the agricultural sector related to the availability of information and expertise? What kind of agricultural expertise and knowledge is considered by farmers and how is it obtained?***

Thirdly, to understand the dynamics are released by agricultural individualization, the present thesis adopts a perspective on epistemic cultures that subsumes all assets of knowledge which farmers link to agriculture. Epistemic cultures describe how knowledge assets are situated in society, i.e. how they are created and warranted. The perspective on epistemic cultures provides insights about the value and significance that the community draws to particular assets of knowledge. Taking the case of smallholder agriculture in the Zarafshan Valley, the present research analyses the role of agricultural expertise within the epistemic cultures of remote rural communities. Since previous agricultural advisory structures appear defunct, the emergence and mobilization of expertise is determined by other factors. Against this background the research asks: ***How does the context of agricultural individualization in Tajikistan, as limited access orders LAO, structure the way farmers organize knowledge and expertise?***

Research Approach

To deal with the research questions the present thesis pursues an interdisciplinary social science perspective. Addressing the initial problem statement of depressed agricultural development among smallholder farmers in marginal rural areas in Tajikistan, the present

research draws on development studies, sociology and ethnography to capture the role of knowledge in this context. Involving different disciplines allows to analyse crosscutting issues as represented by epistemic cultures in Tajik rural communities. With the claim of doing problem driven research the present analysis follows Flyvbjerg's request for genuine deliveries of social sciences: "Good social science is problem driven and not methodology driven in the sense that it employs those methods that for a given problematic, best help answer the research questions at hand" (2006: 242). Thus, this approach to agricultural development in its broadest sense is conceptualized as interdisciplinary research with focus on the social and livelihood dimension of agricultural production. Agricultural production is exposed to governance steering and power interferences on various levels, in particular in the context of LAO. The following parts of the chapter will explain how the questions are operationalized by principal sociological research approach and qualitative anthropological field research methodologies.

Social Science Approach to Knowledge and Governance in Agriculture

Agricultural restructuring not only contains political and economic processes, but impacts on the entire rural cohabitation and livelihoods. With reference to the processes of individualization of the agricultural sector under the conditions of the LAO, change processes are highly political affairs, with many different stakeholders and assets at stake. I choose a mainly sociological and ethnographic approach to grasp the complexity of agricultural individualization processes, addressing the challenges and motivations of smallholder farmers. Using case evidence is the genuine domain of social sciences that allows producing narratives to explain the complexities of transforming local epistemic cultures. Post-Soviet farm restructuring combines economic and social

processes, structured by intransparent political and power interventions with severe impact on livelihoods and production. Providing in such a context qualitative research results is the specific achievement and productivity of social sciences. It is the particular domain of the social sciences to clarify about power and power resources, providing “concrete examples and detailed narratives of the ways in which power and values work in social organizations and with what consequences” (Flyvbjerg 2008: 106). Yet, according to Flyvbjerg, social science case studies concerns also underlying development issues, suggesting “how power and values could be changed to work with other consequences” (Flyvbjerg 2008: 106). Thus, the advantage of the mixed sociological approach lies in the depth and richness of the interdisciplinary perspective on my central development issue of low agricultural performance among smallholders in remote rural areas in Tajikistan, with knowledge as determining variable. Interdisciplinary and methodological set up of the study at hand is framed to analyse the Tajik smallholder agriculture in remote rural areas, in particular with regard to the three main issues, addressed in the research questions and hypothesis.

Making Sociology Matter

It is a central concern of Flyvbjerg to underline the particular scientific competences and achievements of the social sciences against the conceptually ever more dominant natural sciences.⁶⁶ To corroborate the unique position of the social sciences, Flyvbjerg elaborates a specific approach to make sociological research relevant to present day problems. He calls this approach phronetic social science. “*Phronesis* concerns the analysis of values - ‘things

⁶⁶ Flyvbjerg categorically defends the social sciences against belittling from natural sciences (2011).

that are good or bad for man' - as a point of departure for managed action" (Flyvbjerg 2008: 83). This approach elaborates on Aristoteles who places in the Nicomachean Ethics *phronesis* between *techné* and *episteme* (Flyvbjerg 2008: 79). The three intellectual virtues have different characteristics and are used to achieve different objectives (Flyvbjerg 2008: 82). Flyvbjerg sees the role of the social sciences and particularly sociology to assist in making judgements. It is in this regard that phronetic social science puts an emphasis on values and power (Flyvbjerg 2008: 78), i.e. the values upon which people base their decisions. "Phronetic sociology explores current practices and historic circumstances to find avenues to praxis. The task of phronetic sociology is to clarify and deliberate about the problems, possibilities and risks that different social organizations face, and to outline how things could be done differently" (Flyvbjerg 2008: 106)⁶⁷, therewith clarifying values, interests and power relations. The phronetic social science approach focuses on how values and power form the basis of social practices. As analytical program phronetic social science abstains largely from theory building, instead solution-oriented and based on interdisciplinary work.⁶⁸ The concept is deliberately kept open to take developmental trajectories into account. "Phronetic sociology is also not about, nor does it try to develop, theory or universal method. Thus, phronetic sociology is an analytical project, but not a theoretical or methodological one" (Flyvbjerg 2008: 105). The openness of phronetic research approach allows the flexible use of mid-range concepts such as meshwork governance to identify

⁶⁷ The quote continuous "all in full knowledge that we cannot find ultimate answers to these questions or even to a single version of what the questions are" (Flyvbjerg 2008: 106).

⁶⁸ Both, phronetic social sciences and grounded theory basically resign from creating a comprehensive theoretical framework. Despite methodologically very close, phronetic social sciences differ from the later approach in its orientation on development with explicit focus on values and power relations.

avenues to praxis, i.e. the mobilization of expertise and knowledge practices in the context of everyday rural livelihood provision. The conceptual flexibility of the phronetic research approach has been criticized as liberal normative programme (Clegg et al. 2014; Schram 2004), however it enables the analytical framing of evolutions as the post-Soviet agricultural restructuration under the conditions of neopatrimonial authoritarian LAO. For this kind of research perspective, case studies are particularly suitable, as they emphasize on knowledge and power.

Framing the Case Studies

Case studies are central to the social sciences, deriving most and genuine insights by producing narratives that order complexities in the sense of Geertz (1973).⁶⁹ Ideally it sets out to draw a concrete plan of action, providing a set of “concrete examples and detailed narratives” of the kind and means in which “power and values work” (Flyvbjerg 2008: 106) in societies. This perspective includes the analysis of thereof consequences and indicates potential change processes (Flyvbjerg 2008). Good case studies combine a mixture of methods to display the complexity of the phenomena. Case studies, according to Flyvbjerg, are problem driven research (2011: 313) and deliver depth, richness, completeness, and within-case-variances. Burawoy elaborates the extended case method that deploys participant observation to locate everyday life in its foreign and historical contexts (1998: 4). His concept of case studies based on participant observation that enables to overcome the “discrepancies between normative prescriptions and everyday practices” (Burawoy 1998: 5). Successful case studies employ a methodical mix as outlined with regard to *phronetic* science above.

⁶⁹ Geertz points to the genuine role and capacity of social sciences: “Seek complexity and order it” (1973: 34).

Case studies may consist of sub narratives or sub-units. Individual units within the case may be studied in a number of ways, for instance qualitatively or quantitatively, analytically or hermeneutically, or by mixed methods (Flyvbjerg 2011).⁷⁰ Important for the study at hand is the capacity of case studies to provide comparable and generalizable findings of complex contexts.⁷¹ Case studies stress ‘developmental factors’, as the case typically evolves over time, often as a string of concrete and interrelated events which occur “at such a time, in such a place” and that constitutes the case when seen as a whole (Flyvbjerg 2011: 301).

The thesis at hand is taking agricultural knowledge in the Zarafshan Valley as case for the transformation of epistemic cultures during the post-Soviet period after Tajik independence. Whereas, the geographic boundaries of the Zarafshan Valley constitute one part of the frame of this study, thematically it is knowledge in agriculture. “The drawing of boundaries for the individual unit of study decides what gets to count as case and what becomes context to the case” (Flyvbjerg 2011: 301). Later examples will show how case and context continuously interact, for instance with regard to Tajik national policies or the role of religion in society. The case study underlines the value of concrete, practical, i.e. context-dependent knowledge what enables it to display complexity and in-depth insights. There is no contradiction in the single case study and the generalization of its results, as just as scientific experiments, the case study is a starting point and corroboration of theories. Case study research is equally prone to failures as other research methodologies, e.g. being too specific or giving in the tendency to confirm the researcher’s preconceived assumptions (Flyvbjerg 2006:

⁷⁰ The following refers to Flyvbjerg’s methodological discussion of case studies (2006).

⁷¹ This includes the freedom of the researcher who has the choice of what is to be studied.

309). To this end, a well done case study research is complementary to other methodologies and approaches. Therefore the present research complements case studies, in-depth narratives and context, with quantitative data of the farm diary survey (Tajik Farm Diary 2013).

Field Research Methodologies

The above elaborated approach manifests itself in a specific field research design to address farmers' motivations, interests and strategies, governance processes and underlying power relations. Methodologically this thesis is based on long term ethnographic field research that allowed for a series of repeated semi-structured interviews and participatory observations. In total eight months of field research were conducted between 2011 and 2012. The methodology was informed by the extended case study approach that collects accounts of "what 'natives' actually were doing, with accounts of real events, struggles, and dramas that took place over space and time" (Burawoy 1998: 5). In particular I have employed the following research methods: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and farm diary survey (Tajik Farm Diary 2013).

Participant Observation

Participant observation as research method requires long time or repeated presence of the researcher in the community to create rapport and trust (Mack et al. 2005). At the same time it creates the basis for applying different field research methods (Bernard 2006) which enable the collection of various types of data: Sociological, demographic and economic figures, e.g. the farm diary survey (FDS 2013), NGO profiles, local publications, expert statements, administrative data and oral history. Being able to conduct field

research often alone, being culturally and language-wise prepared, eventually allowed creating trustful relations with local people. Interviews were carried out with the help of female research assistants, to close language gaps and compensate the fact that many households in rural areas are headed by women farmers. This constellation enabled to contact a wide variety of local actors (Bernard 2006). Such contact and acquaintance allows then for participant observation, this means participation in village life, i.e. local fests [*tui*] and rituals [*maraka*], talks on the fields or communal gatherings [*majlisi*]. Participation in this regard means, being involved in everyday talks and actions, and being able to ask questions. Participating in everyday life of three particular communities in the Zarafshan Valley allowed me to observe and document social networks, decision making processes and important other procedures. Main disadvantages of participant observation are its time-consuming procedure and the related difficulty to document the data. This means also being clear about the emic or etic perspective of collecting and documenting the data. The data collected allowed me to reconstruct the emic perspective of local farmers on their daily matters (Kottak 2006: 47). The technique of participant observation is an inherently subjective exercise (Mack et al. 2005). This requires taking a broad perspective, being clear about the own presence and positionality. The researcher is in several ways part of the situation and has a practical impact on the situation that is under research, which implies also ethical concerns (Bernard 2006: 439f). Also with reference to the Flyvbjergs phronetic social science approach, I openly admitted my research interest and related objectives. Field research was designed as open as possible, categorically following an interdisciplinary approach in data collection as proposed by

development studies or Galtung's approach to peace studies (1984: 8).

Semi-structured Interviews

Most parts of the information used in this study stem from 156 semi-structured interviews⁷² as well as a farm diary survey (FDS). As a result of the methodology, the interviews had varying character; from spontaneous *ad hoc* conditions allowed talking with an interesting informant to pre-arranged interviews. At the same time interviews were planned and often repeated in order to gain knowledge about the general context and specific correlations. These interviews were semi-structured and background oriented along guidelines (Bernard 2006: 210f). The latter type of interviews was carried out recognizing systematically the social layers of the rural society as discussed in the previous chapter (see chapter 05). Furthermore, interview partners were selected as representatives from the various groups of actors, such as heads or representatives of collective or individual *dehqon* farms, male and female heads of households, local elites and village poor (Bernard 2006; Rubin and Rubin 1995). Occasionally also representatives of the state were interviewed. Talks with interesting resource persons were conducted, whenever possible, several times. This allowed for a critical continuation of the interview and if necessary further enquiry, triangulation and contradiction (Neuman 2014: 166). As a rule, I quote from interview partners anonymously, providing the place and date of the interview. Whenever possible, I seek to give a brief background to the informant and situation of encounter. However, as social and state control is considerable in the villages, much information was exchanged on the basis of mutual

⁷² The specific research approach and methodology of doing participant observation led to the high number of single interviews, whereas interview partners were often consulted several times.

confidence. Informants gave their consent to be interviewed on the condition to treat the data responsibly, e.g. confidently from authorities, other villagers and local elites. Regularly my knowledge was requested in exchange for farmers' knowledge.

The Farm Diary Survey (FDS)

The intention of implementing the farm diary survey (FDS) was to gather data that complements to participant observation and interviews. For this objective a specific methodology was developed. In particular, the survey was set up to capture the full agricultural cycle of farming households, while producing comparable, chronological data on farming activities and practices (Mandler et al. 2017).⁷³ Smallholder households documented their farming activities on a weekly basis for the period of one year. Particular focus lay on the thorough documentation of weekly farming activities, its underlying reasons and motivations, including potential challenges. By asking about interactions with other farmers, authorities and clients it became also possible to learn about the required stocks and sources of knowledge. The farm survey was implemented in two villages in Tajikistan, one in southern Shartus district, the other in the Zarafshan Valley, Panjakent district. In every village eight households were selected based on gender of the household head, farm size and location, and economic situation of the household.⁷⁴ With the help of skilled field research assistants, the selected households compiled the four-page questionnaire on their weekly agricultural activities for the period of

⁷³ On a side aspect, the farm diary survey experiments with and develops further qualitative data collection methods, especially in a non-Western agricultural context: The farm diary was designed involving farmers' formulations.

⁷⁴ Selected households were preliminary interviewed to get an idea about the participants, i.e. the size of their land, education level and agricultural productivity.

one year except for the winter break between November 2012 and February 2013. Analysis of the data set was then undertaken individually by the involved researchers. I used the computer programme AtlasTi to analyse and display parts of the data set.

Challenges to Data Collection

Data collected from authorities and official documents often transmits numbers and information that represent or imitate the government view. While it appears very difficult in the first view to obtain data from district level authorities, the available data provided by authorities needs critic revision. Figures and framework of the datasets are in many cases not easily comprehensible. In Tajikistan, as in many post-Soviet states, public data is in many ways treaded as state secret, which needs to be hidden from public or stripped of significant content as much as possible (Lebedeva 2006). This approach results from the Soviet state doctrine and is under conditions of the limited access order continuously re-enforced. Authorities' restrictiveness regarding public data meets with social structures in the Tajik society. The population of Tajikistan is predominantly Muslim and maintains strict rules of social interaction (Harris 2004, 2012; Stephan 2010). Such rules are potentially tightened in rural communities. Doing research in rural communities is thus *per se* dubious to local dwellers.

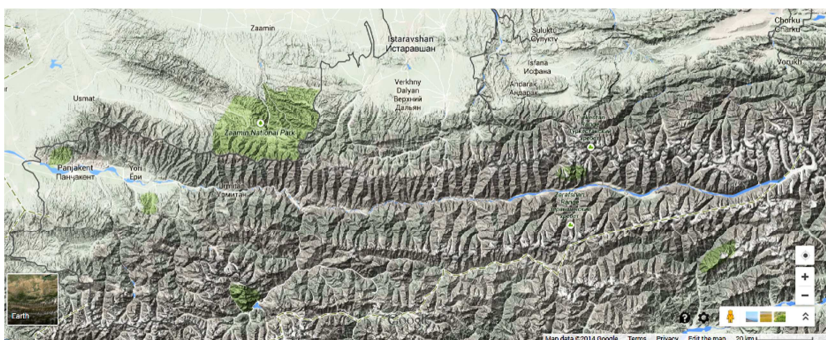
“Due to mentality of the locales, any ‘stranger’, who is wandering around and ‘collecting words for nothing’, is not a ‘trustworthy person’. He may ‘collect words’ for the security office about suspicious local men. Or he may invoke suspicion of the local government about his suspicious work. An anthropological research is not a part of the Soviet-born mentality of ‘suspicion’ and an anthropologist remains ‘stranger’ to it” (Boboyorov 2013a: 42).

Data collection in rural communities is thus a cautious process. Abstract political constraints and power interests potentially cause difficulties on local level, where powerful elites use general political directives, i.e. regarding religion or security, to intimidate villagers and strangers alike and treat basically any information as secret (Boboyorov 2013a: 104). Thus, interviewing farmers was not necessarily welcomed and occasionally even hindered. Authorities possess plenty of means to exercise close control over farmers in rural areas. As an outcome, many farmers react with self-censorship and minimizing their collaboration with the researcher. The selection of methodologies for this study has taken into consideration these circumstances. Interviews were carefully arranged and when possible consecutively continued in order to establish trustful relationships. However, even with well-known respondents it was not possible to record interviews; instead all interviews were noted down manually. Recording statements appeared a threat, as the interview partners associated recorded statements with practices of the police and secret services. My research methodology was sensibly modified to avoid potential interference from authorities. It is evident from the specific methodology that the present field research tried whenever possible to go beyond pure data positivism. Provided availability, data was triangulated by different sources. Data from different sources was openly discussed with informants or the respective discussions were observed and documented. Triangulation of data was a crucial exercise for the researcher in order to trace and understand power relations. However, such an approach requires at the same time transparency about the positionality of the researcher himself. This means in the present research, being outspoken about the own ethical standpoint, i.e. positionality especially with regard to religious matters, but also to comment the

political situation. This links closely with Flyvbjergs' phronetic social science approach, which explicitly requests from the researcher to clarify values, interests, and power relations as the basis for praxis. A contemporary reading of *phronesis* must not only pose questions about power and outcomes, it is also requested to provide answers to value questions. Flyvbjerg positions the phronetic researcher as being able and assist to develop "situational ethics" (2001: 130) which help people to make judgements and decisions, because focusing "on values, the phronetic researcher is forced to face the question of foundationalism versus relativism, that is, the view that central values exist that can be rationally and universally grounded, versus the view that one set of values is just as good as another" (2001: 130). Thus, the researcher is required to give a feedback on value-rational questions themselves, clearing the own positionality regarding the encountered values, knowledge and power. In order to limit the challenges of being a stranger to the villages, I put a lot of efforts to arrive in the community with the recommendation of external community members. Often the visited communities were selected on the basis of existing links. The help of my research assistants was in this regard invaluable. On various occasions we visited extended family members of the research assistants which allowed to build trust with the respondents and overcome more quickly the gap of being stranger. Through such arrangements and the possibility of extended presence in the community I was able to collect detailed ethnographic data.

5 *Livelihood Provision in the Zarafshan Valley*

The Zarafshan Valley is a remote and mainly mountainous sub-region that extends along east to west latitude in northern Tajikistan. Its physical surface is characterized as a long glacial valley, formed by the Zarafshan glacier. Steep tributary valleys contribute to the much eroded river channel. Settlements and arable land plots are usually not at river level, situated on elevated alluvial fans that stem from narrow tributary valleys.



Map 4 Topography of the Zarafshan Valley. Source: google/maps.com (accessed 01/2016).

The map shows the topography of the Zarafshan Valley with the eponymous river extending from east to west. The valley divides horizontally central and northern Tajikistan; it extends straight from the Kyrgyz in the east to the Uzbek border in the west. While mountains block the border to Kyrgyzstan, the national border to Uzbekistan between Panjakent and Samarkand has been closed since 2010.⁷⁵ The landscape is characterized as sparse dry steppe vegetation, with warm summer, semi-arid continental climate.

⁷⁵ Regarding the closed border between Panjakent and Uzbekistan see a detailed account at: <http://www.tethys.caoss.org/penjikent-pandschakent-pendschikent/> (accessed 01/2016).

Precipitation follows an annual pattern with peaks in late spring and autumn.⁷⁶ Due to the significant difference in altitude between the upper and lower parts of the valley, climatic conditions are diverse. The tables below provide insight in the changing micro-climate between the elevated Kūhistoni Mastchoh district, which is determined by high mountain environment exceeding 5000m, and the lower parts of the valley in Panjakent district at about 1000m above sea level (m.a.s.l.). The two communities mark the extension of my research area, completed by two other communities in the mid Zarafshan, and upper Zarafshan respectively. Case locations have been selected due to its distribution within the several districts in the Zarafshan Valley and for representing the main agricultural production systems: Rice, fruits, potatoes and livestock.



Photograph 1 Irrigated land plots in the upper Zarafshan Valley near Revomutk village. Source: The author.

⁷⁶ The GEF precipitation model for the Pamir-Alai mountains indicates a higher precipitation of the upper Zarafshan Valley between 700 and 1100mm/annum than the data collected from the Kūhistoni Mastchoh meteorological office documents. See: www.bonn-dialogues.com (accessed 01/2016).

Temperatures and Precipitation in Madrushkat village, 2235 m.a.s.l.

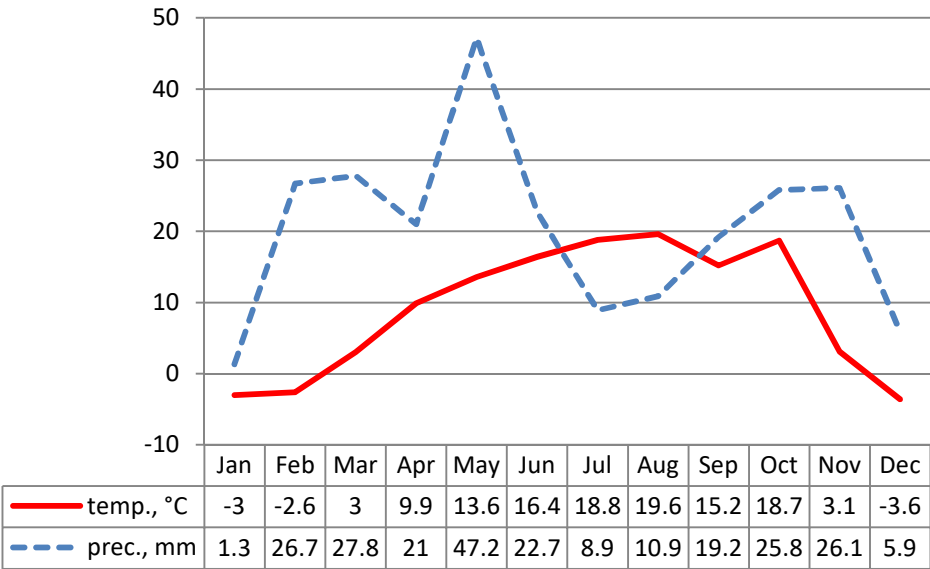


Figure 2 Temperatures and precipitation in Madrushkat village in the upper Zarafshan Valley. Source: Meteorological office in Madrushkat village, modifications by the author.

Up in the higher parts of the Zarafshan Valley annual precipitation is significantly higher compared to the lower parts of the valley. Available data for 2011 for the Kūhistoni Mastchoh district shows an annual total precipitation of 244mm, while generic data for the city of Panjakent displays a total of 159mm per annum.⁷⁷ These figures corroborate the utter importance of irrigation for agricultural cultivation as precipitation during the vegetation period from May till August is not sufficient for rain fed cultivation especially in lower parts of the valley. Irrigation is organized through a complicated system of micro channels that provides water from tributary rivers

⁷⁷ Data retrieved from worldweatheronline.org (accessed 10/2017).

over many kilometres to the single plots. Farmers did not engage in water harvesting or water storage, either individually or collectively.

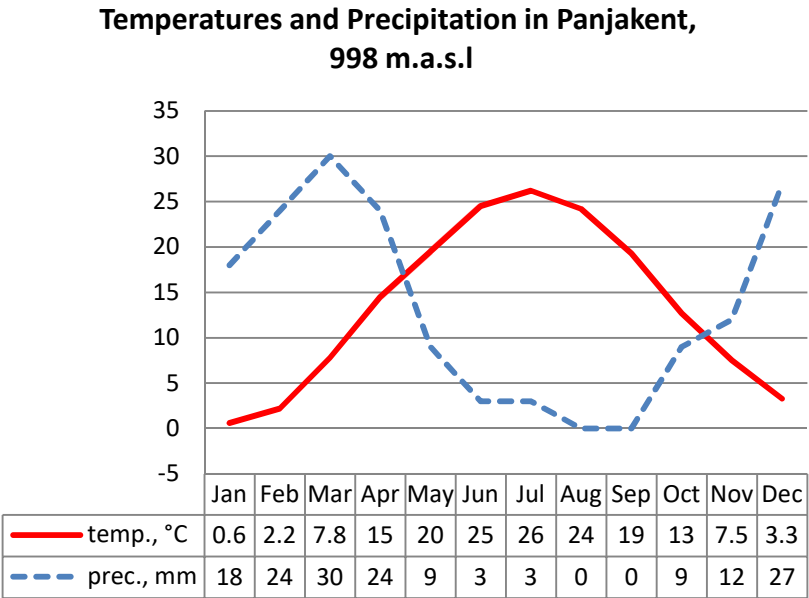


Figure 3 Temperatures and precipitation in the city of Panjakent in the lower Zarafshan Valley. Source:

<http://www.worldweatheronline.com/panjakent-weather-averages/sughd/tj.aspx> (accessed 01/2016).

Temperatures in the upper Zarafshan Valley are significantly lower and precipitation distributed over the year as compared to the Panjakent district, which explains deviating agricultural patterns that will be described in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

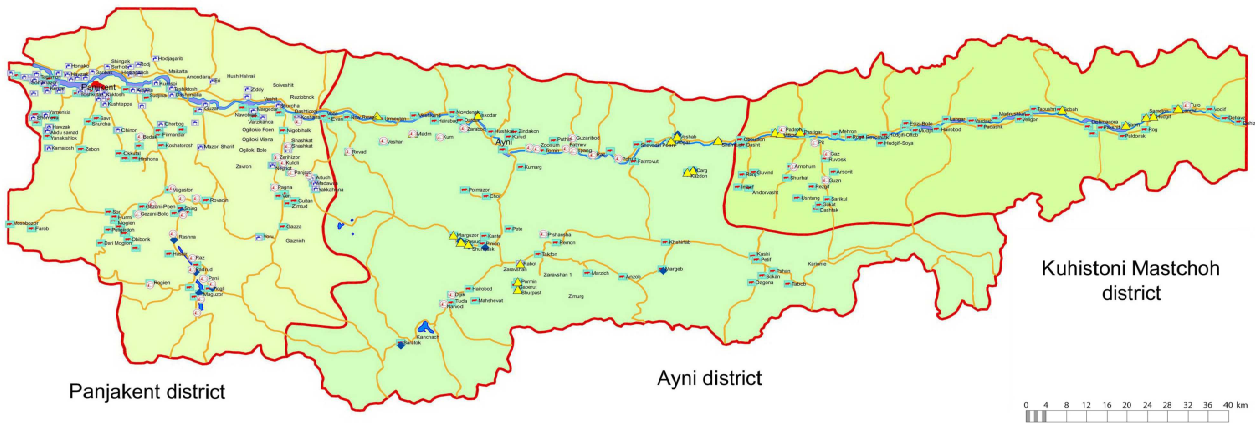
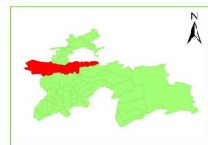


Photograph 2 Dry mountain vegetation near Soosun village. Source: The author.

Administrative Division of the Zarafshan Valley

Administratively, the Zarafshan Valley is situated in the Sughd province [*viloyati Sughd*] of Tajikistan and is divided into three sub-provincial districts [*nohiya*] that cover the Zarafshan River from Panjakent district in the west, Ayni district in the middle parts, to Kūhistoni Mastchoh district in the east. The three districts Panjakent, Ayni and Kūhistoni Mastchoh summarize to 24 municipalities [*jamoats*] that are situated along the Zarafshan River. Each district is governed by the district administration *hukumat* which is led by the head of district, the *raisi nohiya*.⁷⁸ The *hukumat* administrates the district, directing local ‘power organs’, i.e. power authorities [Russ. *organy vlasti*] as the district deployments of the army, the secret service and the police. The *hukumat* entails various administrative branches that concern rural areas and agriculture. That is first of all the agricultural department, locally called *agroprom*, but also the land or cadastre committee that issues important land certificates.

⁷⁸ Often simply called *hokim*, i.e. governor.



Map 5 Administrative division of the Zarfshan Valley. Source:
Welthungerhilfe Tajikistan, modification by the author.

While the *hukumat* is based usually in the main community of the district, rural areas are governed by the sub-district administration, the so called *jamoat*. The *jamoat* is the lowest state organization on municipal level and in charge of settling local conflicts. It has various branches, in the Zarafshan Valley these were not standardized throughout the different *jamoats*. In most *jamoats* a representative of the *hukumat's* tax office is available. The chief of the *jamoat* is the *raisi jamoat*, who is appointed by the head of district for an unlimited term and who was usually very visible in its sub-district. Due to the neopatrimonial character of policy-making prevailing also in the Zarafshan Valley, the *hukumat* and its related branches tend to be limited to nearby communities as they usually lack the means to travel to remote areas. However, many issues on local level involve the *hukumat's* land committee, the agricultural department [*agroprom*], the ecology department or the tax department and therefore cannot easily be solved on municipal level. Such disputes tend to become very complicated because they entangle local institutions and administrative units at municipal [*jamoat*] or district [*hukumat*] level. As the cases further below will show, the *hukumat* usually has little incentives to interfere in local affairs and refrain from settling conflicts on local level. Table 2 below presents some of the principal organizations to which Zarafshani farmers refer to settle agricultural matters. These organizations display for now only one side of the governance process, i.e. the part of the state administration. Local governance processes are complemented by local institutions that are the first instances to settle conflicts. I will elaborate a few example cases of governance processes with regard to the negotiation of access to arable land in detail in chapter seven.

Relevant organisations involved in local governance processes in the Zarafshan Valley	
<i>raisī jamoat</i> sub-district level	The <i>raisī jamoat</i> , chiefs of the <i>jamoat</i> , fulfil an active role in local communities. Those <i>raisī jamoat</i> that I encountered in the Zarafshan area were exclusively male, actively involved in pushing change processes and settling local disputes. The <i>jamoat</i> acts as the interface between the rural population and centralized authorities. Although the <i>jamoat</i> has not much executive powers, depending on the sincerity of the <i>raisī jamoat</i> the organisation had significant authority in the Zarafshan Valley.
<i>agroprom</i> district level	<i>Agroprom</i> is the common name for the agricultural department of the districts government <i>hukumat</i> . The activities of the <i>agroprom</i> concentrate on information dissemination, advice and occasional distribution of seeds. Through the latter it exercises some control of farmer. The <i>agroprom</i> is usually no source for agricultural expertise but provides advice regarding administrative procedures, e.g. relating to the ecology department, the communal forest or rangeland administration [<i>leskhoz</i>] and others.
Collective <i>dehqon</i> farm local level	Collective <i>dehqon</i> farms in the Zarafshan Valley are successors of former Soviet <i>kolkhoz</i> farms. <i>Kolkhozes</i> were split up during the 1990's into several collective <i>dehqon</i> farms. Chiefs of the collective <i>dehqon</i> farms were usually the first contact for visitors of the community and work closely with the chief of the sub-district [<i>jamoat</i>]. At times of the field research these farms were very important in many Zarafshani localities as they still controlled large properties. Since 2014, many of the Zarafshani collective <i>dehqon</i> farms are dismantled. Decision making in these farms was not transparent, but dominated by the chief [<i>rais</i>], the remaining staff [e.g. <i>brigadir</i> , <i>buchhalter</i>] and an advisory board [<i>uski slovi</i>] that assembled usually six to eight powerful figures of the community.
<i>shuroi deha</i> local level	The local village board is a rather newly introduced organisation initiated by the <i>hukumat</i> . It is sometimes also called <i>komiteti kishlok</i> and often builds on previously existing village committees. The <i>shuroi deha</i> gathers between 20 and 40 of the important persons of the village. The chief of the <i>shuroi deha</i> has an important facilitating role, either to settle conflicts in the community or to address strategic projects.

Table 1 Organizations involved in local governance processes in the Zarafshan Valley. Source: Own observations and Shaumarov (2008, Figure 9), Roche (2005) and Stephan (2010).

Livelihood Provision and Demographic Development in the Zarafshan Valley

Field research has been undertaken in four villages that were selected as representative for the different agricultural production systems in the three different administrative districts along the Zarafshan River. A closer look at livelihood provision in the Zarafshan Valley reveals that the rural population consists of mainly smallholder households. Farmers' productive and economic actions are limited by the lack of access to arable land. Table 2 below provides an account of some parameters of the locations visited in the Zarafshan Valley, based on own data collection and calculations.⁷⁹ The table indicates size and type of the prevailing agricultural production systems. The data illustrates the low average access per household to natural resources in the Zarafshan Valley.



Photograph 3 Apricot trees in the central Zarafshan Valley near Ayni.
Source: The author.

⁷⁹ Figures are indicative, detailed data regarding arable land plots and the local distribution of arable land are normally not available or not easy to obtain, often incorrect and misleading. Figures publicly displayed in Revomutk village stated the existence of about 101 ha of irrigated fields in 2011. However, an earlier report in 2006, based on data of the municipal [*jamoat*] statistical office, informed that Revomutk village has 27 ha of irrigated land at disposal.

Village/ district	Inhabitants/ House-holds (hh)	Elevation above sea level, m.a.s.l.	Agricultural production system	Total irrigated land / nominal partition per hh in ha	Total kitchen garden/ nominal ha per hh	Livestock, approx.	Total fruit garden irrigated/ nominal ha per hh	Average access to irrigated land per hh, estimated
Garibak/ Panjakent district	2939/ 721	998	rice, vegetables, livestock	160/ 0.22	155/ 0.21	10000	ca. 65/ 0.09	30 <i>sotiq</i>
Soosun/ Ayni district	2658/ 518	1450	fruits, vegetables, livestock	99.5/ 0.19	n.n.	5000	54/ 0.1	10 <i>sotiq</i>
Revomutk/ Kūhistoni Mestchoh district	820/ 124	1920	potatoes, livestock	101/ 0.81	10.45/ 0.08	1500	39/ 0.31	30 <i>sotiq</i>
Madrushkat/ K. Mestchoh district	952/ 174	2235	potatoes, livestock	145/ 0.83	17.39/ 0.09	3440	ca. 50/ 0.28	50 <i>sotiq</i>

Table 2 Access to natural resources and livelihood strategies. Source: Own calculations based on Welthungerhilfe, DFID et al. (2008), interviews and the *jamoat* statistic office.

Agriculture is the central livelihood and economic pillar in all four case locations. Rural households' kitchen gardens are very important land plots for vegetable production which is a mainstay of the rural livelihood (Rowe 2009). Fruit gardens and livestock rearing are usually market-oriented activities. However, Table 1 illustrates already the general small dimensions of local farming households, outlining sub-regional differences between the three Zarafshani districts. Panjakent and Kūhistoni Mastchoh districts are suitable for stable crops, i.e. rice and potatoes, while Ayni district in the mid Zarafshan is dominant in fruit production, i.e. apricots. Livestock rearing is a complementary livelihood strategy, pursued by most households, limited by the capacity to provide fodder or access to pastures. Nevertheless, field research has shown that only very few households in the visited villages manage to gain sufficient income through farming. Local agricultural production is dominated by smallholder farmers, who neither provides sufficiently for the livelihood of average rural households, nor sufficient supply for agricultural markets. Further, Table 4 indicates already the shortage of irrigated arable land as central obstacle to local agricultural livelihoods. To make a living, the majority of rural dwellers need to combine subsistence farming with non-agricultural income from service provisions in urban areas as hairdresser, taxi driver, craftsmen or construction worker. Against this background it becomes apparent that the individualization of agriculture in the Zarafshan Valley has posed severe challenges to smallholder livelihoods. In particular, attention is required to safeguard and potentially increase the households' access to arable land. The following paragraphs illustrate the environmental, administrative and demographic context to agricultural production. Eventually, beside economic obstacles that limit livelihood provision in remote rural areas, also social arrangements complicate farming in the

Zarafshan Valley. The challenges for female-headed farm households' display exemplary complications of smallholder farmers.

Agricultural Production Systems

Although the mountainous conditions of the area provide abundant precipitation in winter months, arable land needs irrigation for cultivation. Intensive rain fed cultivation used to be common in the lower areas around Panjakent, but crops failed in recent years. Small rain fed plots for fodder (lucerne, barley) or wheat on northern mountain slopes provide very low results and often fail completely. According to local farmers, rain fed agriculture became almost impossible in recent years. It is hardly practiced in elevated regions. Instead minor cultivation of cereals on irrigated plots is pursued in tributary villages. Climatic conditions in the upper Zarafshan allow cultivation from April to October. In the lower region two harvests are possible; however this is not always practiced at the moment. The lack of working power, financial and economic constraints prevent farmers to intensive cultivation with massive use of fertilizer and pesticides. Due to land shortage and meagre production per hectare, extensive land use strategies are no option for farmers.

Horticulture⁸⁰ in Central Asia is traditionally practiced on the irrigated plots around the house, kitchen gardens called *obshikori* (Rowe 2009). Such kitchen gardens produce onions, carrots, tomatoes and potatoes, together with fruits such as cherry or apple trees. In case of abundance, products are marketed, although very

⁸⁰ Horticulture primarily differs from agriculture in two ways. First, it generally encompasses a smaller scale of cultivation, using small plots of mixed crops rather than large fields of single crops. Furthermore, horticultural cultivations generally include a wide variety of crops, even including fruit trees with ground crops, whereas agricultural cultivation generally focus on one primary crop.

high transaction costs especially in Kūhistoni Mastchoh reduce economic profits.



Photograph 4 The kitchen garden of Osunmurod in Garibak village. Source: The author.

Horticulture is prevalent in the upper Zarafshan Valley, as well as small- and medium scale potato and wheat cultivation. Onions and lucerne have become increasingly popular in recent years, both for consumption and livestock fodder. Bigger fruit garden plots [*bogh*] with up to several dozen of trees (apricot, mulberry, apples) are situated on nearby slopes. Such gardens also provide important fodder for livestock. Especially the elevated regions of Kūhistoni Mastchoh district are particularly suitable for potato growing and partially vegetable production. Potatoes provide the most important cash crop in the upper parts of the Zarafshan Valley (Welthungerhilfe et al. 2008: 139). Beside potatoes, livestock rearing is an important business in the upper Zarafshan area. Households in this area rely considerably less on off-farm work and remittances from labour migrants. In the central section of the Zarafshan Valley natural conditions do not allow for extensive agriculture due to the lack of arable area and high population density. Areas in the middle parts of the valley around Ayni district specialized e.g. on fruit production. In lower areas of the Zarafshan

more arable land is available, however population density is high. In Panjakent district, beside fruit production, cultivation of grain and rice is predominant.



Photograph 5 Cattle pasture on rice fields in the lower Zarafshan area near Panjakent. Source: The author.

Livestock production and pastoralism has been dominant during the Soviet period in the elevated Kūhistoni Mastchoh district, which is due to shortage of fodder not maintained at the same level today. “In Soviet times the *kolkhozes* in the district were specialized on animals. Today there are more people living here than before. The *kolkhoz* had about 1500 units of livestock” (Revomutk 16.06.2011). Livestock production, e.g. mostly sheep and goats, is an important component of agriculture in the entire Zarafshan valley – often managed in labour division with stockbreeders from lower settlements (*transhumance*) – however limited by the limited access to pastures, high price of fodder production and the and lack of winter buildings for livestock. Farmers largely invest savings in animals, trying to balance out their business between plant production and animal husbandry.

Throughout the entire Zarafshan Valley agriculturally suitable land is very limited; as Tables 4 and 5 display, individual plots are very small and fragmented. A high concentration of inhabitants

particularly in middle and lower parts of the Zarafshan Valley leads to lesser amounts of arable land per capita as compared to the communities in the upper parts of the valley. The average household in the Zarafshan area consists of circa six to seven persons, which comprises the family nucleus of parents and children, plus relatives as elderly parents or single siblings (Hannah 2011; Welthungerhilfe 2012b; 2015: 11). Population pressure is high in the lower sections of the valley, although households have comparably less access to arable land in comparison to the elevated parts of the valley. The minor size of land plots provides for the usual smallholder household only labour between 20-30 working days per year. Thus, smallholder agriculture is in most cases economically not sustainable and is combined with income from non-farm labour (Justino and Shemyakina 2012; Welthungerhilfe 2012b). High numbers of rural dwellers seek employment outside agriculture – on construction sites and in factories in Russia, or services in Tajik cities – especially from communities in the middle and lower parts of the Zarafshan Valley where land scarcity is particularly oppressive. Under these conditions the risk of poverty is high (Welthungerhilfe 2015: 5).⁸¹ Poverty in rural households results from the lack of access to arable land, missing means to commercialize agricultural produce, but also the lack of labour force. In the Zarafshan Valley the highly static access arrangements to land comprise a central obstacle to potential investments in agriculture (Mandler 2015, 2016). The result is economic underperformance and stagnating agricultural production, as

⁸¹ In 2015, 85.2 per cent of households from the middle Zarafshan Valley numbered their annual income with less than TJS 7200 [ca. 1116€] (Welthungerhilfe 2015). The value of the official poverty line was TJS 146.77 per month when it was set in 2013, and stood at 175.2 per month in 2016 (www.worldbank.org/poverty accessed 10/2017).

namely smallholders are very reluctant to invest in their household farm.



Photograph 6 Potato field in the upper Zarafshan Valley near Revomutk village. Source: The author.

Segmentation of the Zarafshani Rural Society

The sub-regionally divers restructuration processes of agricultural production result also from the diverging interests of local stakeholders. Farmers' responses to agricultural reforms are cautious and heterogeneous. Beside the different groups of farmers, a vast spectrum of institutional, organizational and individual actors is involved in shaping the Tajik agricultural sector. National authorities, international organizations (IO) as well as non-state actors (NGO) are providing punctual assistance to farming households, focussing on the provision of information, loans, seeds or administrative advice. However, the role of authorities with regard to the implementation of agricultural policies is, as will be elaborated further below, ambivalent. Bellow, Table 3 presents a relational diagram to outline who are stakeholders in agriculture in local communities in northern Tajikistan. The size of the subsections is indicative of the relative size of the different social categories of local stakeholders. Data of the present diagram results mainly from

the Zarafshan Valley, figures will be further specified in Table 4 below.

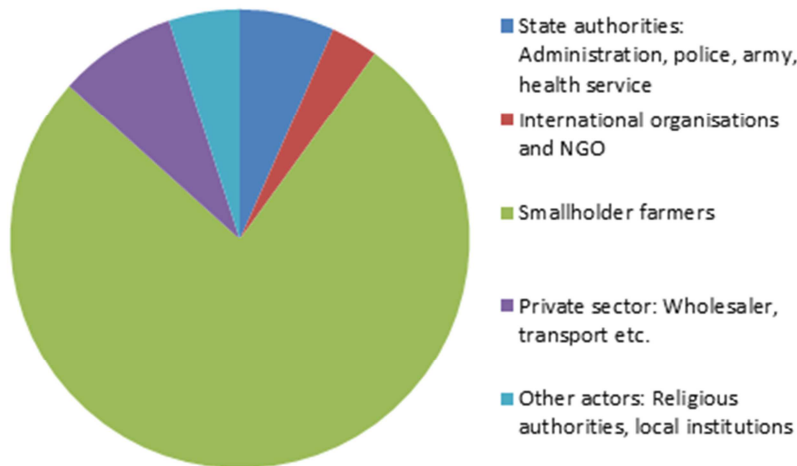


Table 3 Relational scheme of the distribution of rural stakeholders. Source: Author’s compilation

Smallholder Farmers and Female-headed Households

Main actors of the agricultural sector in Tajikistan are smallholders. Rural livelihoods and living standards have declined in comparison to the late Soviet Union. More than one third of the rural population is considered as poor, with figures slightly higher in than in urban areas (RuralPovertyPortal 2012; Spoor 2005; The World Bank 2015: 11).⁸² The majority of rural dwellers in Tajikistan are

⁸² I am following the distinction provided by Spoor: “Relative poverty rates, mostly defined as those who are below 50 percent of the median income, are being used to compare poverty between countries (or regions). However, when a country, for example such as Moldova or Tajikistan, has a vast majority of very low incomes, the threshold of 50 percent of the median might well underestimate the seriousness of the problem. Therefore, as there are, by now, internationally comparable data on absolute poverty rates, these are used in this paper, in order to stress the size of the poverty problem, in particular in the SEE- and CIS-7” (2003: 14f). See also data provided by the World Food Programme: Tajikistan Food Security Monitoring System (WFP 2015) as well as www.worldbank.org/poverty for Tajikistan.

smallholder farmers, i.e. belong to farming households which have access to marginal pieces of arable land.⁸³ Smallholder farmers are typically low-income part-time subsistence producer, with no or very small agricultural output that is being commercialized. Despite the high figures of smallholders, these contribute only marginally to the commercialized agricultural output. Tajik smallholder farmers livelihoods usually consist of part-time farming in combination with non-agricultural income; i.e. remittances of household members working outside the village (Welthungerhilfe 2015; WFP 2015). Livelihoods are discussed in the realm of this research as household strategies to fulfil their subsistence needs (Wisner et al. 2004).⁸⁴ Remittances from labour migration have paramount significance in Tajik livelihoods (Justino and Shemyakina 2012; Mughal 2007).⁸⁵ The majority of Tajik rural dwellers are forced to pursue a “combination of subsistence agriculture, labour migration and shuttle-trading through which the poor seek to earn a living” (Heathershaw 2009: 39). As I will explain below in detail, smallholders’ investments are rarely scheduled to the own household farm. Instead rural dwellers seek to diversify income opportunities by working as driver, day labourer, shopkeeper, dressmaker, midwife, shepherd, etc. Due to male household members are on labour migration, many households are effectively run by women, sometimes for several years. The feminisation of agriculture is a phenomenon throughout the whole Central Asia, although with female-headed households in particular risk of poverty (Mukhamedova and Wegerich 2014). This

⁸³ Smallholder households in the mountainous Zarafshan area considered to have access to less than 0,5 ha of arable land (Table 4). Rural households (hh) are composed on average of six to seven people.

⁸⁴ A livelihood is “the command an individual, family, or other social group has over an income and/or bundles of resources that can be used or exchanged to satisfy its needs” (Wisner et al. 2004: 12).

⁸⁵ Money is sent back by labour migrants as remittances that contribute to about the half of Tajik GDP (World Bank; Lemon 2015).

is because female farmers are confronted with additional obstacles and threats in a structurally male dominated society (Harris 2004; Stephan 2010). For women farmer it is thus highly difficult negotiating with men at family, neighbourhood [*mahalla*] or communal meetings (Harris 1998, 2012; Tett 1996).⁸⁶

*Medium Farmers, Local Agricultural Champions,
Authorities and Elites*

In comparison to the dominant group of smallholder households, a few households in rural communities actually manages to pursue full-time farming, potentially investing in the farm business and generating major parts of the household's income from agriculture. Such farmers belong to the few rural households that are potentially in the position to emerge as future agricultural champions. These households manage to safeguard property and even potentially enlarge access to rural assets. This is achieved by maintaining close relations to powerful authorities that are indispensable to market produce. Nevertheless, there are a few characteristics that predestine these households in particular for farming; a slightly better access to arable land than smallholder farmers, adequate family working power, an energetic and capable head of household. It is mainly these features that enable this group of households to potentially succeed in becoming agricultural champions that link directly to markets, focussing on intensifying agricultural production. Non-state actors and potentially medium farmers may be the main mullah [*domulloh*], the mediator of neighbourhood conflicts [*oqsaqol*], the chief of the neighbourhood association [*ra'isi mahalla*] (Grundmann 2004; Stephan 2010). Their authority is linked to functions in everyday life and mainly based on

⁸⁶ Harris (2004, 2012) elaborates how male domination in the Tajik society is maintained in everyday life.

individual reputation. Thus, this personal has some outreach to governance processes which may help them to climb above the level of ordinary local smallholders. In contrast to the before mentioned groups of villagers, local elites are actually leading rural communities as they dominate decision making processes and arrange to have decisions implemented. Although rural elites are no homogenous group, they can be characterized by being affiliated to the state, although following their own agenda.⁸⁷ Local elites in Tajikistan usually fulfil positions with close relations to authorities and the government, as for instance the chief of the collective *dehqon* farm, village or district authorities, members of the police or army and also the director of the school. Elites mobilize and represent the community; they pre-shape village governance arrangements through their patronage networks. Heathershaw argues that state-society relations in Tajikistan are based on patron-client networks (2009: 50) with local elites being the local intersections of such networks (Boboyorov 2013a). In the course of post-Soviet farm restructuring, former rural elites as the chief of the collective *dehqon* farm, the production manager [*brigadir*], the production expert [*agronom*]⁸⁸ and other top-level *kolkhoz/sovkhos* personal (Abashin 2017) transformed into the category of “Soviet rural elites-turned-farm managers in contemporary Tajikistan” (Nekbakhtshoev 2016: 18). For these persons, a close relation to the representatives of the state is indispensable. This implies, in return for getting under the umbrella of the state – as part of the public administration or being direct client of some authority – elites are required to agree and promote the ideology and ruling paradigm of

⁸⁷ A comparable point is made by the ‘cunning state’ introduced by Krastev, quoted in Zürcher (2005: 22).

⁸⁸ *Agronom* refers to principal or higher agricultural education, however commonly the title is usually applied to knowledgeable people with experience and perhaps technical training.

the state and government (Driscoll 2015; Heathershaw and Herzig 2012).

Unequal Access to Arable Land and Non-Agricultural Income

Generally, as the tables bellow outline, access to agriculturally suitable arable land is scarce.⁸⁹ The highlighted communities from different administrative districts stand for the diverse agricultural production throughout the Zarafshan Valley. Arable land is the resource on which virtually all Zarafshani rural dwellers ground not just their livelihoods, but also the spiritual foundation as a farmer. Rural people have a strong understanding of their identity as a farmer. Being a farmer is not simply seen as a business in the first row, but as lifestyle and ontologically just way of living (Dudoignon and Qalandar 2014; Tajik Farm Diary 2013). Farmers clearly foresee their families' future in the village and do not want to give up the agricultural livelihood (Revomutk 18.06.2012). Looking at the size of arable land available per household in the Zarafshan Valley reveals the difficulty to base the household's livelihood on market-oriented agricultural production. The limitation of access to land constrains a significant part of rural households to pursue subsistence cultivation, combined with non-agricultural income. Table 5 below shows the distribution of land per household in the Zarafshan based on various sources. Figures were compiled by the author using data from World Bank, DFID, UNDP and DFID et al. (2008). Information from *jamoat* statistic office were combined with Ege (2008) and available data (Welthungerhilfe 2015). Furthermore own

⁸⁹ I differentiate between distribution of arable land, what means the factual allocation in a community. Access to arable land is mainly from the perspective of rural dwellers who are able to control a piece of land, despite e.g. unclear property relations.

calculations were made based on data collected in selected communities (Tajik Farm Diary 2013).

Arable land per household in the Zarafshan Valley	Garibak village, Panjakent district*	Ayni district	Kūhistoni Mastchoh district
Landless households	2 %	17.4 %	0.6 %
Less than 10 <i>sotiq</i> **	2 %	32.5 %	1.4 %
10 – 20 <i>sotiq</i>	22.6 %	27 %	4.5 %
21 – 50 <i>sotiq</i>	55.2 %	9.4 %	13.2 %
51 – 100 <i>sotiq</i>	10.2 %	2.2 %	20.5 %
101 – 200 <i>sotiq</i>	4 %	3.2 %	34 %
201 – 500 <i>sotiq</i>	2 %	1.6 %	16 %
More than 500 <i>sotiq</i>	2 %	5.4 %	9.8 %

Table 4 Distribution of arable land in the three administrative districts along the Zarafshan River. Source: Own calculation based on Tajik Farm Diary (2013).

Table 4 outlines the very limited access to arable land of the majority of rural households' especially in lower and mid Zarafshan Valley. In the lower Zarafshan districts more than 80% of rural households are smallholder. This situation results from high demographic pressure on the available natural resources, i.e. on arable land and water. The sub-regional demographic development in the Zarafshan Valley slightly exceeds the general figures for Tajikistan with a fertility rate of 3.5 in 2013 and annual population

growth of 2.2 % in 2014.⁹⁰ Birth rates in rural areas are usually higher than the national average, plus significant internal migration made the population of Ayni and Kūhistoni Mastchoh districts significantly grow since 1991 (Welthungerhilfe et al. 2008). Significant population pressure occurs in the central parts of the Zarafshan Valley, such as Ayni district, where about 77 per cent of the households have access to not more than 0.2 hectare. Such scarce availability of land provides neither labour nor income for one household during the year. Significantly more land is available in the upper parts of the Kūhistoni Mastchoh district, where population density is lower compared to the villages in the lower parts of the Valley. The majority of households in Kūhistoni Mastchoh district (ca. 60%) has access between 0.5 to 5 hectares of arable land. These figures display the disparities in access to land and, at the same time, the generally small sizes of plots available. Table 6 displays a relational comparison of household size in various Zarafshani districts to provide the social background of households, based on their access to land.

⁹⁰ In the context of the Zarafshan Valley arable land is understood as irrigated land plots including kitchen garden. See: <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&country=TJK&series=&period=> (accessed 01/2016).

*Garibak village, Panjakent district, n= 49 (not statistically relevant), **One *sotiq* equals a 1/100 of a hectare; i.e. 1 *sotiq* = 10m².

Farm size	Panjakent district	Ayni district	Kūhistoni Mastchoh district
Smallholder, less than 50 <i>sotiq</i> (0 and 0.5 ha) of arable land	Large group of rural households with marginal or no (i.e. only kitchen garden) access to irrigated land, thus sufficient only for limited farm production. Smallholder households are potentially poor. In order to maintain their livelihood, these households are obliged to organize an additional income from other sources (seasonal or long term labour migration, providing local services as driver or day-labourer, etc.).		
	81.8 % of all hh	86.3 % of all hh	19.7 % of all hh
Medium size farmer, between 51 and 200 <i>sotiq</i> (0.51 and 2.0 ha)	Small intermediate group of middle-class households, with significant income from farming, often backed up by non-agricultural income (teacher, shop keeper, tractor owner, provision of technical services, etc.) This group of local farmers maintains their livelihood significantly through farm income, abstains from labour migration where possible.		
	14.2 % of all hh	5.4 % of all hh	54.5 % of all hh
Large farm entrepreneur, 201 <i>sotiq</i> and above (more than 2 ha)	Narrow group of comparably wealthy local elites (e.g. chief of the local collective <i>dehqon</i> farm, school director, member of the district or sub-district administration [<i>hukumat, jamoat</i>], important local families) who possess large assets of land, sufficient household working power and external labour. The main income of these households livelihoods' is generated by the own agricultural production.		
	4% of all hh	7 % of all hh	25.8 % of all hh

Table 5 Relational comparison of households and provision of livelihoods in the Zarafshan Valley. Source: Data compiled by the author, based on Ege (2008).

The figures in Table 5 underline that more favourable farming conditions are currently found in the very upper parts of the Zarafshan Valley as villagers benefit from enlarged access to arable land. In the Kūhistoni Mastchoh district, only about 20 per cent of the rural households are smallholder, while circa 70 per cent have access to 0.5 and 5 hectare of arable land. In fact, this finding coincides with Table 2 that showed that labour migration in this district is significantly lower as compared to Ayni and Panjakent districts. While the quality of arable land is comparable in the various districts of the Zarafshan Valley, there are differences due to climatic conditions. In lower areas of the valley easily two crops are feasible per year, which is hardly possible in the upper Zarafshan.

The figures presented above illustrate that the majority of Zarafshani' farmers are smallholder. Access to land is heterogeneous, land less households and large farm entrepreneurs are found within the same communities. Not all agricultural actors in the Zarafshan Valley benefitted the same way from agrarian individualization. This implies there are different livelihood strategies in place that rely to various degrees on agricultural production. Smallholder farmers' livelihoods do not derive from agricultural production, but from mixed income opportunities combined with agricultural subsistence production, e.g. remittances from family members abroad and income from services. It becomes apparent that the individualization of agriculture in the Zarafshan Valley has not led to increased productivity and income, but is primarily a challenge to smallholders' livelihood provision.

Agriculture only contributes partially to the households' income, mainly due to the fact that given the size of land plots, climatic conditions and obstacles to commercialization provide for rather limited yields with very narrow profits. Against the background that agriculture does not provide for the smallholder households livelihood, Zarafshani farmers' complaints about the present state of agriculture are very common (Tajik Farm Diary 2013). Many farmers see their livelihood at risk due to the shortage of arable land and water, an unfavourable economic environment and the lack of alternative income opportunities. Low yields, poor quality of harvests and low revenues render agriculture a rather uncertain livelihood. In order to farm professionally, regular investments in seeds, irrigation, pesticides, soils, and fertilizer are required, which most smallholder farmers cannot afford. Consequently most households urge to enlarge access to natural resources to increase output and income from farming, potentially making full use of the available labour force. In an interview in Madrushkat village, one

young smallholder farmer stated: “If you have 50 *sotiq* land and 50 *sotiq* garden, you can easily live here” (13.06.2012). Otherwise, having less arable land available, puts the household’s livelihood is at risk: “I am trying to get additional land [from the former collective *dehqon* farm, A.M.], otherwise for only 18 *sotiq*, I will not stay here” (Revomutk 15.06.2011). Shortage of land implies the lack of employment: 20 *sotiq* of irrigated land means 15 days of work for an average household of seven people. As alternative income opportunities outside agriculture are missing, migration remains the only option to gain an income. Another smallholder farmer with a 20 *sotiq* land plot stated: “40 per cent of the income come from the land, 60 per cent come from construction sites in Dushanbe” (Madrushkat 13.06.2012). As a consequence to the shortage of access to land, smallholder households are constraint to seek an additional income outside farming. Especially male workers from the Zarafshan Valley migrate to Russian or Tajik cities accepting heavily underpaid work as hairdresser, taxi driver, craftsmen or construction worker. The Zarafshan Valley provides almost no alternative labour market to agriculture; therefore seasonal and long term labour migration is high. One smallholder farmer from Obbudon village explains: “You can earn 1000\$ a year here in the [Zarafshan] valley or 10000\$ in Russia” (14.06.2011). In consequence, most local livelihoods in the Zarafshan Valley consist of part-time farming combined with remittances from short or long term labour migration (Table 2 and 5). This means, rural households are often led by women, while their husbands are temporary or permanently away. Despite the fact that the house and land plots are usually registered on the husband’s name, maintaining the household and agricultural production are managed by females in Tajikistan (Mukhamedova and Wegerich 2014). In the following, I illustrate a typical example from the upper Zarafshan study area.

Intersection: The Household of Hokima, Female Farmer

Hokima is a woman of around 40 years, she runs expertly a smallholder household of five females. Her husband died seven years ago.* At the time of my visit her two teenage daughters still went to school. Her two sons work since several years in Russia, sending irregularly money home. With one son already married the daughter in law [*kelin*] lives in her household. Although the *kelin* is a trained teacher [*mualimma*] she cannot find work in her profession and works in the household. Further, there is the old mother of Hokima also present in the household. Hokima owns 22 *sotiq* of irrigated land where rice is cultivated, plus 12 *sotiq* of kitchen garden where she grows vegetables. Apart from this she has one cow, two calves and four chickens. Depending on irrigation water available, it is possible to get two harvests from the kitchen garden. This would provide fresh vegetables for most of the year. She is doing most work together with the three young females and only occasionally hires some workers [*mardikor*] or asks relatives. In spring time she would like to raise silk worms [*pilla*], because there is some spare space in the house and the sticks of the mulberry branches are useful. However, she says she is not seeking for more land, because she cannot work more than what she already does. “I am satisfied with what I have, I can’t do more”. Whenever money is needed she is selling rice at the nearby city market [*basar*]. Previously Hokima used to work as kolkhoz member in an animal production unit with cows. When her sons will come back, or at least one of them, she is planning to buy a tractor so they continue the profession of their father. She counts especially on the second son, who received an education as mechanic. Maybe they will come back this year or next year, just when the money is enough (lower Zarafshan 2012).

* In the 1990’s her husband bought a tractor from the kolkhoz, but respective documents were not immediately ready. After some

weeks a man from the sub-district forest administration [leskhoz] claimed the tractor on the basis that the kolkhoz had depths towards the leskhoz and the tractor was signed as collateral. The kolkhoz thus was not entitled to sell the machine. Hokima's husband went to court and invested money in the process, but he could not get the tractor back. The machine was still entitled on the name of the kolkhoz, so he had to cede it to leskhoz. Hokima stated: "My husband got sick by all this thinking" (field diary 2012).

Managing the Households Working Power

Smallholder households as Hokima realize a medium livelihood through a combination of farming and income from remittances. Generating the main part of income from farming is currently only for a very small group of Zarafshani farmers possible, i.e. an elite group of households who have access to more than average arable land. It was commonly believed in Zarafshani communities that full time professional farming implies access to at least one and a half hectare of irrigated land and having available the respective working power in the own household. The latter displays by now a challenge to many rural households, as male family members migrate to work abroad. Households with just one male are hardly able to intensify production. Professionalizing agriculture in a way that it provides a basic income to the entire household requires cultivation twice a year, ideally including labour intensive high value crops such as vegetables. Additional production such as livestock rearing or dairy production provides important swaths to the overall income. To increase profits, transport, processing and sale of the produce should also be taken care of by family members. Daily tasks are socially divided by gender conceptions, they require a balanced household with adequate working power of male and female family

members in different age cohorts. Field studies by NGO (Welthungerhilfe 2015: 14f) and own observations indicate that smallholder households are not able to level out an equilibrium between working power and the available resources. In consequence, many landless and smallholder households abandon market-oriented production and turn to part time subsistence farming combined with non-agricultural income (Welthungerhilfe 2015: 5).⁹¹

Access to Arable Land

Access to land is perceived by most farmers the single most challenge to their household's livelihood. In virtually all communities in the Zarafshan Valley the availability of natural resources, i.e. arable land and water, is considered insufficient compared to the number of inhabitants, especially as local communities continue to experience rapid demographic growth. Arable land is severely limited and not equally distributed. Competition and disputes over the potential access to natural resources cause frequent discontent and conflict among villagers. Access to arable land is the principal basis of rural livelihoods, it is regulated in the Tajik land code (Republic of Tajikistan 1996). Gaining access to plots of arable land is fundamental for agricultural production; however the entire process is in a twilight zone of the Tajik political economy. Officially land cannot be sold as it belongs to the Tajik state. Land distribution schemes introduced by the various land reforms were completed circa 2005, thus there is no regular and transparent way to gain further land. Nevertheless,

⁹¹ Farmers seek to establish especially male offsprings with own households within the village. Ideally they are able to realize another income from non-farm labor. Only better-off households can permit not to send their relatives to labour migration. Daughters are not equally considered in working and maintaining the families property.

farmers' focus on land is dominant topic in discourses on livelihood and agricultural production throughout the whole Zarafshan Valley.

Conflicts over Land – Race to Access

Repeatedly farmers refer to the shortage of arable land and unclear mechanisms established to buy, lease or render access to arable land: "There is no land available, only dangerous areas, which will be washed off by the river. It is useless!" (Garibak 15.05.2012). *De facto*, the shortage of arable land is complemented by the experience that there are no viable way to increase the individual access to land. This "race to access" is widely mentioned as the main drawback to prosperity or wealth in the area. Increasing one's access to arable land would allow farmers to enlarge their business and consequently building a livelihood that allows all members of the household to remain in the village. Despite administrative deadlock and limitations, there is ongoing competition among farmers to access natural resources. In some communities village harmony [*tinji*] is seriously jeopardized due to a situation of unequal access arrangements. Virtually there are no reasonable ways to employ legal procedures to re-negotiate access arrangements. However, as the tables above already indicated, the determined *status quo* of land access arrangements is in the interests of local elites. Elites are basically those households, household chiefs respectively, who dispose access to above average land plots in the community. Enlarged access allows them to maintain more household members in the village and employ their labour force. Under conditions of the Zarafshan Valley, elites are often households that manage to engage full time in farming.

Manoeuvring Access: Buying and Leasing Land Rights, Underhand Deals

However, the majority of Zarafshani households are smallholders who rely on labour migration to Russia and elsewhere to safeguard their livelihood. Most of these households seek to enlarge their access to land in order to build a livelihood from agriculture.⁹² One and a half hectare of irrigated land is commonly believed to be the threshold necessary to start an individual or family *dehqon* farm, i.e. engaging in professional full-time farming. Farmers concede “it would be best creating my own private *dehqon* farm. But money is needed, because at first I need to get additional land” (Garibak 28.04.2012). Thus, despite the allegedly completed distribution of land plots, it seems possible to access additional land through networking, smartness and underhand payments. Farmers usually apply to different forums parallel, in order not to miss out potential opportunities. Farmers mentioned to enlarging access to arable land by creating land plots on presently non-irrigated dry lands. However, given the alpine character of the Zarafshan Valley, irrigating dry lands is labour-intensive and expensive. Creating new land plots will have to arrange with unfavourable places that are prone to natural risks such as water and mud slides. Furthermore, creating new land requires intensive administrative and communal action. From the perspective of the individual household there appear to be a few viable ways to get access to additional arable land. Farmers reported that occasionally it was possible to buy long term land use rights from the local collective *dehqon* farm or other public entities such as schools, the forest [*leskhoz*] or water

⁹² At time of the field research, the majority of families had considerably less land at their disposal than the mentioned one and a half hectares, so they tended to cease struggling for the individual or family *dehqon* farm and to remain under the cover of the former collective *dehqon* farm.

[*vodkhoz*] administration and the like. Despite the constant refusal of the *dehqon* farm management to sell land rights, it appeared possible to lease land plots on short term contracts, so called *arenda* plots, from the collective *dehqon* farm. Until recently the local collective *dehqon* farm was the main land broker in the community. The majority of requests for land were addressed to the collective farm. Potential land deals or thereof refusals were poorly transparent and regularly triggered conflict and discontent in the community. Only very few requests to the collective *dehqon* farm for land allocation or temporary leasehold were actually considered. Close ties to the chief of the collective *dehqon* farm and his staff⁹³ are indispensable to benefit from land allocations (Mandler 2013: 16). Structure and room for manoeuvre of the communal collective *dehqon* farms differed throughout the Zarafshan Valley. In the lower Zarafshan area such communal collective farms held an important role in village affairs. The central position of the collective *dehqon* farms in the village was mainly maintained because they have kept significant parts of farm land as property. A particular leasehold system was found in a village where the local collective *dehqon* farm has kept 102 hectare of arable land. The enterprise leases land plots as *arenda* for one year to those farming households who agree to rear silk worms during spring months. Households are free to choose this option, what seems especially attractive to poor families with surplus of labour and little access to land. Some communities benefit also from another source of long term leasehold arrangements, that is the forest administration, called *leskhoz*. The *leskhoz* administers land plots that are beyond the territory of the village. Accordingly, villagers make considerable efforts to maintain

⁹³ As legal successor of the Soviet *kolkhoz* or *sovkhoz* farm, the Tajik collective *dehqon* farm inherited and maintained such structures as e.g. the accountant, the *agronom*, the *brigadier* or the *ingenieur*. In some communities the collective farm disposed also of a kind of advisory board [*uski slov*].

close relationships to the forest administration and related administrative bodies as through personal relations and potentially extra payments land plots may be acquired in form of long term leaseholds [*arenda*]. Such leasehold arrangements are very attractive as they potentially become private property in future. Competition for such plots is therefore high; applicants with liabilities to important or influential people will use their networks to manipulate the decision making process. Such arrangements do not work on *ad hoc* agreements, but on long standing relationships. A well connected bidder expressed confidence regarding the forthcoming distribution of some hectare land by the forest administration [*leskhoz*]: „He [the chief of the *leskhoz*] will not say no to me“ (lower Zarafshan 28.04.2012). Taking into account the strong demand for arable land, intensifying short term *arenda* leasehold arrangements would potentially offer mutual benefits. Due to massive labour migration of male family members, not all households are able to cultivate the fields intensively twice a year. Leaving land plots fallow for some time is reportedly neither an option. The Land Code of the Republic of Tajikistan (1996) specifies the principle of “purposeful use of land”, which has been used earlier to sanction households. Different farmers mentioned that authorities seized property on such grounds, thus it was considered not advisable to do so. However, temporary leasehold arrangements to balance the available working power and natural resources in the community are hardly happening. Especially in the upper Zarafshan area farmers had reservations to leasing out land plots, because “the good farmer never gives his land to strangers” (Madrushkat 15.06.2012). Only among close relatives such temporal leasehold arrangements occasionally take place. Renting out land plots bears the danger that the respective land is not returned by the lender. Poor households, as for instance lead by women, risk

that their property is challenged, because they are also weak in defending their property. Subsequent disputes regarding the legitimacy of property are not easy to settle as jurisdiction, be it through local institutions or state courts, is a protracted and opaque process, and poorly predictable (Mandler 2013: 21f). Such adversary proceedings that require external arbitration commonly end in favour of the more resourceful party with access to more powerful networks.⁹⁴ Although difficult to estimate, underhand dealings with fellow villagers or persons working in the sub-regional administration occasionally enable farmers to acquire land use rights. Such arrangements were repeatedly stated by farmers. For example, in various communities of Kūhistoni Mastchoh and Panjakent district it was mentioned that it is possible to buy or obtain the use rights of one *sotiq* of [0.01 ha] for 1000\$ (upper Zarafshan 28.03.2012). One way to contrive such underhand deals is through a formal letter [*ariza*] to the *jamoat* land committee to request shifting land use rights from one person to someone else in form of a gift. In this way the land formally changes owner, without payments involved. However, the due payments are then arranged privately (mid Zarafshan 09.05.2015).

Certification of Land Plots

In fact, during the time of the field research some farming households started to certify their property in order to safeguard it from requests by others and as a first step towards founding the private *dehqon* farm. I will elaborate on farmers' considerations regarding the setup of a privatized individual or family *dehqon* farm in the following chapter six. Exemplary is the case of one farmer who runs a medium sized farm, mainly cultivating potatoes,

⁹⁴ The scattered availability of short term *arenda* arrangements throughout the communities in the Zarafshan Valley reflects the capacity of local institutions to come to decisions and implement them (Revomutk 18.06.2012).

urgently trying to certify his arable land, because other villagers already have questioned his property. “They request parts of the land and write letters [*ariza*]. Therefore I now want – before other villagers understand or act – to transform this land quickly into a private *dehqon* farm. But money is needed to get the certificate from the *hukumat*” (upper Zarafshan 15.06.2011). He hurries, because he got the land as *bobogi* – what is illegal as he admits.⁹⁵ “If someone comes and requests land from me, he is right and he should get the land. But he will not get the land, as he would have to pay – the *hukumat*, the police, the court – so that someone enforces his right” (upper Zarafshan 17.06.2011).⁹⁶ Originally the *jamoat* land committee has agreed to certify his land, but later on another institution disagreed. He urges to get this land, because otherwise, so he explained, for the potentially remaining 20 *sotiq*, “I will not stay in the village” (upper Zarafshan 17.06.2011). However, at present time his request is stalled as he cannot afford the required extra payments to speed up the process. Until about 2014/2015 land certifications issued by the district administration *hukumat* were considered the strongest evidence for property. Certifying land plots meant to disable previous access arrangements and legalize the access as the certification overrides previous property documentation. It was commonly assumed that no legal ways possibly dissolve or expropriate certificated land plots. Thus, the certification allowed to legalize the diverse ways to claim access to land, which is important as I will outline in with regard to *bobogi* land claims in chapter seven below. Again, the certifying land property was reserved to the thin layer of local elites (mid Zarafshan

⁹⁵ *Ariza* is the name of complaint letters sent to authorities. *Bobogi* is a local institution that underlines the belonging of property. I will elaborate on both terms in depth in chapter seven and eight of this thesis.

⁹⁶ The farmer continues: “By law everyone here, every family, should have 10 *sotiq*. So when poor people write letters [*ariza*], nothing happens. You need money.” (upper Zarafshan 17.06.2011).

23.06.2011) who eventually opted to establish an individual or family *dehqon* farm. Smallholder farmers, on the contrary, refused to certify land due to a lack of financial and organizational resources. Manifold administrative difficulties and involved costs to certify land plots made heads of poor households simply decline to take action (upper Zarafshan 28.06.2012). There were undefined costs involved in certifying land: “[O]fficially I should be able to receive land certificate for less than 50 *Somoni* [app. equivalent to \$15 USD], but in fact you can get no certificate without giving 200 greens as a *shapka* [bribery, A.M.]” (Shaumarov 2008: 71).⁹⁷



Photograph 7 Pasture above Garibak village. Source: The author.

Zarafshani' Agriculture as Limited Access Order

Limited access to land and unequal distribution are two factors why the individualization of the Tajik agriculture did not increase farm income and livelihoods. Beside this, due to the remote situation of the Zarafshan Valley, access to markets is linked to high transaction costs. Major markets for Zarafshani producers are the cities of Khujand and Dushanbe, both rather distant and barred by high

⁹⁷ The currency of Tajikistan is the Tajik *Somoni* [TJS]. The average exchange rate at the time of field research in 2011 and in 2012 was at 1€ = 6 to 6,45 *Somoni*. For price calculations throughout the study the exchange rate of 6,45 is used.

mountain passes. From the topographical point of view, the markets of nearby cities of Samarkand and Bukhara were easiest to reach, however the border to Uzbekistan is currently closed, farmer cannot sell their produce there. A senior agricultural advisor from the lower Zarafshan assumes:

“There is no local market [in the whole upper Zarafshan area, A.M.]. People buy all things at once in autumn when money is available [from bypassing lorry drivers, A.M.]. We have no wholesale market. But if the borders to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan were open, Kūhistoni Mastchoh potato farmers would live like kings” (Soosun 21.06.2011).

Inadequate infrastructure, volatile markets and rent seeking elites and authorities create poor economic incentives. Many Zarafshani farmers perceive their own business situation as rather grim, as they count the demographic development and limitations of the natural environment as risk to the households’ livelihood: “In future, only a few people in the village will work with land” (Garibak 01.05.2012). Smallholder farmers are concerned with the prospect of being forced out of agriculture that is ever less able to provide a livelihood, while a small group of village elites will manage to increase access to land. A pensioner put today’s competition for land more drastically: “[In future] the rich will get even richer and will leave the country, while the poor will die in epidemics. The situation will be like in some states in Africa” (Soosun 11.06.2011). Economic concerns do not only relate to the unequal access to land and elevated transaction costs, but also recognizing the own weakness with regard to interferences by authorities, elite persons and co-villagers that easily force economic projects to halt. During a period of increased food prices, the state government decided to stipulate meat prices in spring 2011. Authorities imposed price limitations on central markets in the capital and elsewhere and

eventually detained several butchers for selling overprice (Eurasianet, 2011; RFE/ RL Tajik Service, 2011). Zarafshani farmers stopped thereupon selling livestock, which in turn led to a further increase of meat prices (lower Zarafshan 18.05.2011). Despite this intervention turned out to be short term; however such interferences cling to farmer's common knowledge and corroborate the general perception of negative conditions for investments in agriculture. Interventions in the individualized agricultural livelihoods exemplify restricted access opportunities that are part of the limited access order (North et al. 2012) present in Tajikistan. Characteristics of the LAO, as leaders rent seeking tactic, disinterest for reform and the race for assets prevail throughout the Zarafshan Valley. Tajik LAO patterns include excessive bureaucracy to effectively condition farm households. I will come back to the patterns of Tajik policy making in the case studies below. However, with direct reference to the previous social system of the Soviet Union, state and elite interventions are not necessarily seen as a problem, mere as misguided exceptions. Some villagers even formulated principal objections towards the liberal market economy⁹⁸ as represented by the free land market: "Opening a land market is dangerous, because some rich people would buy all land" (Garibak 04.05.2011). Accordingly, some farmers spoke out against the complete privatization of land that would lead to many poor people in rural areas due to the absence of alternative work opportunities "in mines or factories" (Garibak 04.05.2011).

Limitations to Female Headed Households

The LAO as underlying pattern of Tajik policy making is not just a matter of top-down regulations. Instead, LAO patterns as the race

⁹⁸ In the terms of North et al. (2012) the so called Open Access Order OAO as opposite to the LAO.

for assets are produced bottom-up as well. Regulations of the LAO unfold through deliberate interventions of bureaucracy, powerful elites or administration, but embrace cultural aspects too. In Central Asia, cultural and religious institutions determine precisely the role of women in society or maintain exclusive positions for certain clans or families (Massicard and Trevisani 1999; Trevisani 2007). Thus, LAO arrangements do not only impose rules on societies, but also deny rights to society. Due to the widespread labour migration of men, much of the agricultural production in the Zarafshan Valley is currently managed by women. Women are traditionally in charge of the kitchen garden, plant protection, the cultivation of vegetables and post production of agricultural produce. Male household members usually take care of livestock, transport and staple crops as potatoes and rice. The head of the household, however, is overseeing the general timing of agricultural activities, the commercialization of products, the finances and negotiation with others. In Central Asia, this role is usually taken by the senior male of the household. However, under current livelihood conditions the feminisation of agriculture took also root in the Zarafshan Valley where by now many women act as heads of households. Although, women are neglected in village governance processes and side-lined in negotiations regarding transport, agro-techniques, services and commercialization (Boboyorov 2013a:95f). Considerable social pressure is exercised to reduce the sphere of influence for women in local communities. Limitations are attached to beliefs of adequate Islamic behaviour as “[...] women should not leave the house so often” (Garibak 10.05.2012). Following such fundamental arguments or even personal intimidation, it is no surprise that female headed households in consequence are inclined to accept low retail prices (Garibak 04.05.2012) or unfavourable land allocations (Madrushkat 02.07.2011). By no surprise, none of the

new individual or family *dehqon* farms visited in the Zarafshan Valley between 2011 and 2012 was legally led by women – what contrasted, for instance, with the situation in the cotton areas of southern Tajikistan.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, *de facto* many Zarafshani smallholder farm households are currently run by women. Husbands or sons are providing remittances that are earned outside the village, while the daily livelihood depends on women. Female farmers rely in many ways on the assistance of men to maintain agricultural production. Support is provided by relatives; who may however potentially exercise power over the respective household. As mentioned above, there are cases of intra-family land grabbing, often at the expense of female headed households (upper Zarafshan 02.07.2011). Several times I encountered female-headed households that had to cede parts of their arable land due to requests from other villagers¹⁰⁰ as they were not able to mobilize enough support to defend their land. Female farmer Nasirat, whose parents moved to this village before her birth, stated: “I wrote letters [*ariza*], but no one helped. In this village is local favouritism [*millatci*; treating others as strangers, A.M.]. Nothing happened, because I don’t have background [*pusht*] here” (upper Zarafshan 01.07.2011). The reference to the powerful background [*pusht*] is interesting as it denotes the power a person is presumably able to mobilize through its networks. To have a background [*pusht*] means to have access to important people, i.e. friends, relatives,

⁹⁹ During a visit in the southern Shartus region in 2012, I met several female headed households who managed fully privatized individual *dehqon* farms with up to 10 ha of land, including male employees – at the time a very unlikely situation in the Zarafshan area.

¹⁰⁰ Talking with a group of farmers, I observe how in the background another group of people cuts the branch of the drinking water tap for one or two households in order to reinforce the water supply for the water taps in another sub-quarter of the village. While they cut the tube, one woman arrives outraged on the spot. There are wild discussions, but she can’t stop the process. Obviously she was not consulted before. (Garibak 08.07.2011)

acquaintances, who act when necessary. *Pusht* is for instance important to get an employment with the state, but also to resolve trouble with authorities. It is common knowledge to seek a livelihood where you have *pusht*, as nothing works without *pusht*. Eventually, Nasirat had to cede parts of the household's arable land to her husband's family while her husband was working abroad. "When the brother of the second wife [who claimed her land, A.M.] came to resume the land, people said that it is not true and fair to take the land. However, the land was passed on to the brother, with the reason that my family is not from here" (upper Zarafshan 01.07.2011). Once the other party has appropriated the piece of land, it is very difficult to claim it back as local institution consider the case as settled and state organizations will rarely agree to interfere. Thus, in consequence, such conflicts are often reason for violence.¹⁰¹ This corroborates that female headed households are at risk to become marginalized (Bakozoda et al. 2011: 8, 10; Boboyorov 2016) and subsequently being overreached in business affairs too. Female farmers are certainly disadvantaged in local governance processes that are based on male superiority over women and rule out debates of social development. Women are *de facto* less able to generate *pusht* and mobilize power in governance processes. Taking into account the absence of state authorities to guarantee women's participation in village affairs, there is very little margin for female farmer to challenge male-dominated governance decisions. Hence, female headed households have less room for manoeuvre than their male counterparts. Talking with the young female farmer Nasirat who heads a smallholder household, she acknowledged difficulties in land negotiation processes: "Land distribution was not so good for us as my husband was not active to claim farmland

¹⁰¹ In one village in the upper Zarafshan Valley a shootout had taken place that was sparked off by a conflict regarding pasture land.

when it was necessary. Now we own only 30 *sotiq* and a small garden” (Madrushkat 30.06.2011).¹⁰² Taking the example of the village assembly [*majlisi umumi*] the most visible local governance body in the community, the individualization of agriculture in the Zarafshan marginalized the role of women to a minority, occasionally intimidated by competitors.¹⁰³ During a talk with the main facilitator [*oqsaqol*] in a big village, he explains how to call attendance for *majlisi umumi*.

“I call people together. They tell the neighbours and inform others. People have to attend, it is mandatory. If someone is in Russia, the neighbour attends and reports to his wife. The wife will then inform the neighbour’s wife” (upper Zarafshan 13.06.2012).

Thus, in Zarafshani communities women’s attention at the village assembly is actually no matter of course. The systematic discrimination of women in agricultural and communal matters, legitimated with cultural and religious reasons, is in fact a post-Soviet phenomenon intended to stop local competitors. In practice Zarafshani female household heads are hardly in the position to invest in agriculture as they struggle with competitive disadvantages induced by male dominated governance processes (Mandler 2015: 10, 13). This situation is effectively sustaining the LAO, as the state undertakes no efforts to advocate for female farmer.

Protracted Investments in Household Farms

The difficulty to increase access to arable land remains the central obstacle to rural economic activities in the Zarafshan Valley. Given

¹⁰² Field research showed that female led households are more likely to experience poverty.

¹⁰³ The subordinated role of women in public meetings is expressed in the statement of a male farmer: “Women only agree with all arguments, they have no own point” (lower Zarafshan 08.07.2011).

the states monopoly on land, there is basically no incentive that awards talented producers to increase business. Chapter seven will outline how local conditions in the Zarafshan Valley do virtually not permit to enlarge the production area. Provided that minimum access to land is available, there is no lack of farmers' future projects.¹⁰⁴ Under the current conditions of land scarcity smallholder households refuse to make substantial investments in agriculture. Further, this is a consequence from the lack of financial resources that repeatedly compel farming households to cultivate crops without proper agricultural inputs or preparation of soils (Tajik Farm Diary 2013: HOK, ORZ, BAH). Seasonal shortage of money is a severe challenge, partially solved through barter trades with lorry drivers especially in Kūhistoni Mastchoh or possibly access to micro-credits. Smallholder households however, are very reluctant towards investments in agriculture as there are unbearable risks involved concerning agricultural production, commercialization and the political environment. Addressing potential investments in agriculture, farmers repeatedly referred to negative experiences to justify their reluctance. Narratives of failed business investments are commonplace. One repeated example was a *kamaz* [truck] driver who took several tons of dried *sardolu* [apricots] from local farmers for 0.8 *Somoni* [ca. 0.12€] per KG in commission. He went to the city of Khujand, but could not sell the

¹⁰⁴ The Tajik Farm Diary (2013) provides some information about farmers ideas for possible investments:

- Establishing a post-production sector: E.g. canned and dried fruits. Processing meat and dairy products
- Revitalize vine production and processing in the lower Zarafshan region
- Establishing a chicken fabric, i.e. egg and poultry meat production
- Intensify livestock rearing and Yak breeding
- Diversifying production to avoid local monocultures of potato and rice
- Extending the cultivation period through intensified irrigation and the use of seedlings or greenhouses
- Production and processing of high value crops such as vegetables and fruits.

fruits for this price, instead only for 0.5 *Somoni* [ca. 0.07€] per KG. He had to cover the debt by selling all his livestock (Soosun 12.06.2011). A similar story describes a collective deal of a group of farmers from Ayni district who bartered apples with rice from the Panjakent district. It was agreed to exchange 2 KG of apples for 1 KG of rice. Several tons of rice was shipped to Ayni, but by the time the apples arrived in Panjakent, most of them had gone bad. The rice producers wanted their crop back. But the rice was not available anymore. In the end the villagers from Ayni agreed on paying for each KG of rice (Soosun 12.06.2011). Thus, the difficult access to markets in remote areas facilitates unfavourable business. One example is the practice of barter trading in the upper Zarafshan, which is stable but provides marginal profits. Such arrangements do not contribute to the transition of smallholder households from part-time subsistence to full-time market-oriented farming. Approaching towards commercial farming is a complex option for Zarafshani farmer, suitable only for those households which have settled the multiple challenge of safeguarding the livelihood.

Summary: Challenges to Rural Livelihood Provision

The chapter elaborated various factors complicating the productivity of individualized Zarafshani' agricultural production systems. Farming households must cope with harsh natural conditions, limited access to arable land, poor infrastructure and distance to markets. Income from agriculture is very low so that many rural households rely on remittances from family members working outside the village. For these reasons, smallholder households are not able to maintain or develop full time agricultural livelihoods. Complicated regulations and uncertain land access arrangements limit the households' production capacities. Due to significant labour migration, smallholder households are often led

by women. Translocal livelihoods have established as significant parts of the local working power have left rural communities. Female lead households do not enjoy the same room for manoeuvre in village affairs as their male counterparts. Together with state regulations such arrangements effectively implement and maintain limited access orders (LAO) in rural communities. In this context, farmers are not disposed to channel resources to invest in their farm business. The individualization of agriculture in the Zarafshan Valley has therefore not led to increased productivity and income, but is primarily a challenge to smallholders' livelihood provision.

6 *The Individualization of Agriculture as Crisis of Expertise*

The previous chapter illustrated how the individualization of the Tajik agriculture unfolded as a challenge to the livelihoods of smallholder Zarafshani farmers. This chapter discusses how farmers refer to knowledge, information and expertise to maintain and improve their farming livelihoods. It is argued that farmers consider agricultural expertise with caution. Farmers hesitate to act or invest upon available agricultural expertise, i.e. knowledge, locally considered as significant for agricultural production, because it turns out that quality and trust are central issues when approaching new knowledge assets. Hypothetically I assume that especially smallholder farmers have difficulties to access trustable agricultural expertise, which explains why this group only reluctantly invests in innovations or implements changes upon new knowledge. The chapter starts with a synthesis of how agricultural information and expertise is available in the Zarafshan Valley, including farmers' reflections regarding the usefulness of these knowledge assets. These sources are not for all rural dwellers in the same way accessible. The second part of the chapter presents the case of selecting seed potatoes, demonstrating how knowledge sources on local level turn out as unreliable and not trustworthy. The example of seed potatoes shows the detrimental effect on investments and production practices. The third part of the chapter describes farmers' considerations regarding the founding of the individual or family *dehqon* farm. This case shows how information and advice become incalculable for small and medium farmers so that they abstain from this potential household consolidating opportunity. Both examples reveal that individualized farm households

experience a crisis of agricultural expertise, because it is hardly being implemented or guides farmers operations

Agricultural Information and Expertise in Zarafshani Rural Communities

Recalling the failed business examples described in the previous chapter five makes apparent that it is not simple for Zarafshani farmers to obtain reliable information about developments in the agricultural sector. Sub-regional or national information channels that provide timely and trustworthy news are hardly established in the Zarafshan Valley. Information and advice is exchanged selectively in some communities, often with support from authorities or NGOs linked to special extension efforts. Request for expertise and knowledge sharing beyond the local level is rather rare. Some villages benefit from their vicinity to administrative centres; however the district agricultural offices [*agroprom*¹⁰⁵] are hardly providing professional and quality advice. Still, the *agroprom* provides at least a kind of political picture of present developments in the district government [*hukumat*], for example if central political directives coming from the capital are sustained by district authorities. Potentials for sharing knowledge have much increased nowadays due to better travelling conditions, mobile phone network coverage, TV broadcasting and in some cases even internet, which reaches also remote parts of the Zarafshan Valley today. Interestingly, newspapers or farmer associations were not

¹⁰⁵ *Agroprom* is the Russian abbreviation for the agricultural department at the district government or administration [*hukumat*]. Every district has an agricultural office, which is subordinated to the provincial agricultural department. "Agroprom is an agency of the Ministry of Agriculture and maintains offices in all regions and districts; their main tasks are collection of statistical information and establishing production forecasts" (De Danieli and Shtaltovna 2016: 163). The *agroprom* occasionally conveys seeds to farmers and provides advice, however, it is considered outdated information.

mentioned in the long term farm survey as sources for information (Tajik Farm Diary 2013). Generally, in-depth agrarian information from academic or political organizations is poorly transferred from the centre to the periphery. In the Zarafshan Valley only few farmers associations are operating, often dependent on support from international NGOs. Respectively low is the average knowledge of rights as farmers' and citizens' or knowledge regarding the national legislation (Bakozoda et al. 2011; Welthungerhilfe 2006).

Expertise in the Local Arena

Questioning farmers on agriculturally relevant knowledge in remote rural areas is both stating the obvious in form of everyday's knowledge and dealing with particular individual expertise. Thus, agricultural expertise is an open concept, concretized against the particular local affairs. Zarafshani farmers usually acknowledge proudly their thorough understanding of how to cultivate rice and potatoes; how to harvest and process apricots etc. However, at the same time they indicated that currently agricultural expertise is not considered the relevant knowledge required to run a farm. Through family training, every farmer is specialized on practices that suit his farming household best and contributes particular innovations to increase efficiency. General knowledge and concrete know-how to solve agriculture related problems is present in each household. One elder medium farmer in Garibak village in the lower Zarafshan Valley states:

"I am myself an agronom [agronomist]. New sorts and advice are not necessary, because I have a long experience as brigadier. I am able to see from the potato if the seed is good. There are two types of corn: fodder and wheat. I am myself advising people, even better than students who graduated from TAU [Tajik Agrarian University in Dushanbe]" (09.05.2012).

Such refusal of nascent agrarian education and external agricultural expertise appears as overestimation of one's own capabilities, but is rather the norm. While the statement sounds ignorant and odd; farmers present their expertise with defiance, referring that the real problems of agricultural production do not stem from these issues. However, generally expertise is not appreciated and as esteemed as it used to be in Soviet rural environment "engineering -oriented" epistemic cultures (Van Assche et al. 2016: 38). There is also anger tangible that agricultural expertise is not suitable and irrelevant under present conditions, while instead other domains of knowledge enjoy higher esteems and are simply more requested. Due to the absence of centralized *kolkhoz* structures, that incorporated various communities, the disposition to research and knowledge sharing significantly decreased.

Local Networks and the Consideration of External Expertise

Agricultural expertise in the Zarafshan Valley is concentrated around the locally predominant production systems as livestock rearing, i.e. sheep farming or fruit and vegetables cultivation, i.e. potatoes, apricots, vine, fodder grass, wheat, and rice. Including the seasonal cycle of agricultural labour, these are mainly recurring to routine tasks as preparing soil and irrigation. Farmers then concentrate on decisions regarding the acquisition of fertilizer and its application, the correct timing of harvesting, processing and selling produce (Tajik Farm Diary 2013). At the same time financial resources must be at hand to handle necessary investments. A typical week plan for a smallholder farming household in the lower Zarafshan area in June 2012 reads as follows:

"Taking care of fertilization and weeding of rice field and the vegetable land: potatoes, carrots, onions, cabbages and tomatoes. Preserving fodder for animals and taking care of

big animals [i.e. cows, A.M.]. Prepare construction materials [mud and stones] to repair the buildings of the household. To buy two sheep for making them big and fat. Planning to care for 0,5 hectare of vegetable growing land; watering, providing mineral fertilizer and 0,5 KG of ammonium nitrate” (Tajik Farm Diary 2013: BAH I, 103ff).

The long term perspective of a one year survey reveals that farmers are busy to organize the cycle of investments and commercialization, while tackling challenges of financial shortages in between (Tajik Farm Diary 2013). When the farmers were asked about potential sources of new knowledge, there were hardly any answers apart from the standard ones that farmer refer to their local networks: “[I ask the] local master [*ustod*] on land processing, rice and vegetables growing. [Then I ask] relatives and friends on when to plan, how to give fertiliser and how to grow vegetables” (Tajik Farm Diary 2013: BAH O 152ff). Locally available agricultural expertise is usually attached to individuals that are considered experienced in certain sections of farming and who gain in the course of time attributes such as master [*ustod*], *agronom* or *muhisafed*. Farmers usually seek expertise first within the community, as this is available without costs. In fact, at present time the readiness of local households to invest in external knowledge is rather low. Farmers underline the importance of their individual efforts to acquire knowledge in order to manage change process which started with the end of collective farm work. The perception of being individually responsible of property and livelihood is grounded in the experience that counting on authorities or co-farmers for assistance or subsidies is in vain. A young smallholder farmer from Garibak village, lower Zarafshan Valley, noted:

“I rely on my own brains. I am attentive and have always been working and never damaged anything. For advice I

turn to an acquainted person in Dushanbe who helps me out with agricultural advice, seeds and other stuff. This person is related to the agricultural department and has good knowledge” (01.06.2012).

Technical agricultural advice is mainly provided through individual networks. These are perpetual networks, which are currently being reinforced. Very often farmers state that advice is requested from the elder generation of farmers with experience who have knowledgeable reputation. The generalized term for such persons in the Zarafshan area is *muhisafed*.¹⁰⁶ A common statement reads: “I decide on my own, but sometimes I ask experienced elders [*muhisafed*]. There are various *muhisafed* [with different expertise, A.M.] around: animals, garden, and soils” (Madrushkat 12.06.2012). Advice is not necessarily retrieved from immediate neighbours within the same *mahalla* [neighbourhood], especially as they are often competitors i.e. regarding scarce land and water resources. Naturally, there seem to be preferences and antipathy among neighbours, just as some prefer to seek information from either within the extended family or outside the village. “I cooperate with my neighbour. He gives me advice on cultivation, time schedule, applying fertilizer, plant protection and so forth. For further questions there is the *agronom* of the former *kolkhoz* [i.e. the collective *dehqon* farm], people come to ask him” (Garibak 30.07.2011). Farmers know very well which kind of expertise is available in the village and how to approach the various resources. One elder smallholder female farmer states: “Two people from this village work at the district *agroprom*. So first I will visit those elders

¹⁰⁶ *Muhsafed* means literally white hair and denotes experienced elder, a source of wisdom. With regard to agriculture these are usually experienced elderly men or women who in some cases had a professional training during Soviet times. The institution *muhsafed* exists communally for various matters and has its female equivalent *kampir* or *hojji bibi*.

who have experience, even though they live in other *mahallas* [...] then I will ask the two acquaintances from the *agroprom* about prices and what to cultivate too” (Garibak 09.05.2012). As soon as farmers manage to increase their room for manoeuvre in terms of reputation, administrative permissions or financial resources, they explore also other potential crops and techniques. Among those farmers who manage to secure the household’s livelihood, readiness for innovation is high. One mid-age smallholder farmer explains how he tests new crops: “I learn on the *basar* from sellers if there is any interesting new sort [variety of seeds]. If I decide to try the new variety, I will then take a probe of it and sow it on two *sotiq* of my terrain to try it out and compare with other crops” (Garibak 05.05.2012).

Distrusting Expertise

Zarafshani farmers generally appear reluctant to speak about the actual knowledge necessary to farm. This results from the potentially irritating interview situation with a foreigner which despite my extended presence in local communities continued to exist. Certain trade-offs in communication and comprehensions remain inevitable. However, farmer tend to marginalize the specific agricultural expertise which provides their daily livelihood, such as timing to cultivate certain crops, treating soils or preparing irrigation.¹⁰⁷ Principle farming knowledge is considered to be commonly known, thus nothing that is much emphasized. As mentioned above with regard to farmers’ casting aspersions to agricultural research and training organizations, the quotations below outline considerable suspicion that is expressed regarding advice coming from outside experts. Small and medium farmers do

¹⁰⁷ For this reason the Tajik Farm Diary (2013) was established to learn about local knowledge practices and processes related to the agricultural livelihood.

not seem to value much external agricultural expertise, instead potential advice and sources of information about agricultural practices are regarded dismissive. A considerable number of interviewed farmers presented themselves bluntly as experts without need of further instruction. The quotes above showed how farmers' reservation turned into severe and persistent distrust towards third party knowledge providers by international NGOs. The response of the head of a poor household in the upper Zarafshan Valley to my question for potential sources of advice summarizes this attitude:

"I don't need any advice. I do everything on my own. There is a veterinary available in the city. He knows that there are diseases in the soil. To know this I don't need the laboratories. The laboratories do not tell the truth. Why? What is the truth? Here is no alternative to potatoes"
(12.06.2012).

This perception of knowing things better than outside experts and authorities, and in consequence distancing oneself from national and international institutions, was rather widespread especially among small and medium farmers. One typical statement reads, here from a smallholder farmer: "Regarding advice I am well set up. I know the potato business better than the *agronom*. Sometimes the NGO holds seminars on potatoes [but I cannot follow most advices] because there are no means to do so. I need to grow potatoes anyway" (Madrushkat 13.06.2012). The latter part of the statement gives an explicit reason for the problematic of agricultural expertise. Most households lack opportunities to put expertise into practice. Farmers in the upper Zarafshan know very well that under current conditions there is no realistic alternative to the cultivation of potatoes. Limited resources, lack of political participation to lobby for subsidies, administrative support or the

rule of law and the difficult economic environment leave virtually no room for manoeuvre to change the mode of cultivating potatoes. External knowledge and agricultural advice therefore appear as request, incompatible with the daily reality of local farmers.

Poverty as Constraint to Expertise

The difficult relation of Zarafshani farmers to agriculturally relevant expertise becomes even more complicated among distinctly poor households. The phenomenon that poor rural dwellers are least interested in knowledge assets and communication was experienced a couple of times in different Zarafshani communities and has been observed also elsewhere in Tajikistan (MEDA 2006). My observation in a village in the lower Zarafshan Valley confirms this:

While being invited for tea in a marginalized neighbourhood, a group of elderly men and women from rather poor households had gathered. I asked about irrigation of their rice fields, knowing that this is a sensitive topic in this water-scarce community: “Do you know the mirob [person in charge of the water distribution]?” One older woman responds: “No, this is unknown to me. The neighbour is telling us all that we need to know about water”. The surrounding other seven or eight people, of whom two male, agree. I am taken by surprise because I considered the mirob an important figure in the community as he schedules the water to the field. His services must be paid. I reformulate my question, but the response is the same: “We have never been to anyone; [and we] don’t know where to go”. In fact, their households even are not linked to the communal drinking water conduit. As they don’t pay nor pressure the mirob, their rice fields receive water last, which means less amounts of water than others. Visiting another humble

household in this neighbourhood I am to make a similar experience. We talk about taxes, local prices, the need of official documents and individual relations to the collective dehqon farm in the village. As this household is very short on land and water, the collective dehqon farm would be naturally the first address to request additional arable land on short or long term. However, the elderly lady leading this household refuses to apply for anything. "No, no, no, I don't go there". I continue to ask about other institutions were she potentially could appeal to, such as the committeti kishlok [the village committee], the domkom [local name for mahalla], the committeti sanho [women committee]. The response is negative again. Abruptly her neighbour, also an elderly lady, sitting next to her shouts: "Frankly, no one will ask women committee [committeti sanho]. We do not frequent this. We ask each other. We go nowhere" (04.05.2012).

Especially poor households seem disinterested and detached from local and sub-regional networks. Poor farmers have little interest in knowledge initiatives and offers on agricultural expertise result from profound political and social exclusion. Firstly, poverty makes it difficult for the household head to build and maintain networks, especially with respected and important people. Such relations are based on reciprocity and prestige (Boboyorov 2013a), which poor households simply cannot provide. Secondly, there is feasible social stigmatization of poverty; poor people are implicitly excluded and withdraw themselves from attending meetings, entering households or taking fully part in social and religious procedures. Encounters at other households usually imply further obligations as future hospitality or gift exchange, which poor people cannot afford. Poverty is *de facto* a stigmatization that limits social mobility.

The deadlock of economic opportunities caused among poor households defeatist mood, which among others expresses itself as denial of almost any kind of external advice. One elder farmer, head of one household in the land-scarce community Revomutk on the upper Zarafshan, summarized his situation:

"I cannot do anything because I am poor. Anyway, I will stay poor; it is rizq [individual fortune and destiny in Islam]. My brothers here and in other places, they are all the same. Nobody borrows, no credit, no arenda for one year [short term leasehold]. Everything is money [pul]" (20.06.2011).

Eventually, this poor farmer stopped its already low level market-oriented production, shifting the households' livelihood on to occasional wage work of the father and his two adolescent sons in nearby villages and the northern city of Khujand. The reference to the prescribed individual fortune *rizq* is telling in this regard. It denounces an unclear personal shortage that causes the poverty of the household. As we will see in the case of access negotiations in the chapter below, poverty is implicitly a sign for being a bad believer. A households' tight material situation and poor access to land is linked to individual shortcomings of present and even previous generations. This way poverty turns into a stigmatization, equalling poor people with bad followers of Islam.

Restrained Investments in Seed Potatoes

Against the background of the social dynamics that shape the approach to knowledge in Zarafshani communities, the following section will present the case of selecting seed potatoes. Following up farmers' selection criteria for seed potatoes illustrates the importance of knowledge to identify unreliable and not trustworthy information. At first, farmers value and calculate pros and cons of the various available seed potato varieties. It appears that due to

unreliable sources of knowledge and information, especially smallholder farmers eventually abstain from investments in new varieties and remain with the local seed material. The example of seed potatoes corroborates thus the hypothesis that especially smallholder farmer face difficulties to identify and access locally adequate, trustable knowledge. The sphere of uncertainty regarding agricultural expertise has a detrimental effect on farmers' investments and production practices.

Kūhistoni Mastchoh district in the upper part of the Zarafshan Valley is a famous potato growing area in Tajikistan and has in recent years also gained importance as potato seed producer. In 2010 the president of Tajikistan visited Kūhistoni Mastchoh and declared the sub-region "National Potato Seed Producer of Tajikistan" (Welthungerhilfe 2012a: 10) what in analogy to Tajik cotton production equals an official order to engage in potato production.

In fact, natural conditions are particular suitable in the elevated parts of the valley to engage in potato seeds production, because the soils are less infested with nematodes and the Colorado potato beetle (*leptinotrasa decelineata*) pest is significantly reduced at altitudes above 2000 meters. Seed production requires decisively more labour, but provides significant higher revenues. Virtually, all local farmers are producing seed potatoes for own consumption, which are traditionally selected from the seasonal harvest of table potatoes. Basically, small and proper potatoes are hand sorted and stored for the next sowing. The remaining potatoes form the actual volume of harvest, which is then either sold, bartered or consumed. Farmers well understand the economic potentials of producing potato seed material for the national market. Since professional seed production requires available land plots and significant financial investments, professional reproduction of potato seeds in the Zarafshan Valley is the domain of a few leading farm

households, who possess sufficient arable areas and who are able to handle the extra efforts. The majority of households in Kūhistoni Mastchoh carefully evaluate the options of the different available potato seeds, to find meanwhile an economic niche as table potato producer, selling only occasionally potato seed material. In 2012, local farmers were able to select from three major types of potatoes to cultivate.

Firstly, there are locally produced, traditional potatoes. These are usually bartered or sold at production costs among producers from other villages. Such exchange happens between every one and three years. Due to the age of the variety and long-time infestation with diseases, yields of the local type of potatoes are very low. The reproduction rate of this sort is with less than 1:3 very low. Secondly, farmers may opt for regionally imported seed potatoes. Acquiring seed potatoes is possible at the main markets in Dushanbe and Khujand or through truck drivers [*kamazistiy*] who act as travelling merchants passing through the villages. Prices vary between 1.8 and 2.5 *Somoni* per KG. A famous and widespread variety is *pakistanez* a hybrid seed allegedly imported from Pakistan.¹⁰⁸ Also other varieties are available (e.g. *gallanda*, *condor*, *picasa*, *romanzyi*). It was stated several times that *pakistanez* seeds contain nematodes and therefore harm the soil. However, their performance is consistent and the reproduction rate ranges from 1:3 to 1:5 even on bad soils. A third option that exists in the valley is to target on imported elite or super-elite seeds or the locally re-produced elite seeds of these varieties. However, such seeds are not always available as they were donated and imported through a European Union funded development project and professionally increased by members of the local NGO Potato Association

¹⁰⁸ See the forthcoming work of Michael Spies on agricultural production, in particular potato-growing, in Gilgit-Baltistan (Pakistan).

Kühistoni Mastchoh (PAKM). The potato association received super-elite seeds with the task to establish a reproduction pyramid for seed potatoes in the district. The benefits for local farmers are apparent: Elite seeds degenerate with much less speed and bring above average results for six and more years. The organization PAKM itself sells self-produced, i.e. re-produced seeds of the 2nd and 3rd offspring from the imported elite sort *norika* at prices between 2.5 and 3 *Somoni* per KG. Cultivating these seeds promises reproduction rates of 1:10 and above. It is obvious that the differences in the reproduction rate have an enormous economic impact. Selection and cultivation of the right potato seeds can provide for potato producers already within one season big benefits. If farmers manage to produce seed potatoes, profits would be even higher, especially if they don't sell the harvest right away, but reproduce the seed material in the following season. Yet, in practice, farmers cannot simply consider yields and profits, but have to calculate income with more complex variables. Thus, not only the selection of the right seeds is technically difficult as it needs careful coordination with the household's resources, i.e. arable land, irrigation and soils, but also regarding work force, capacities and wholesale network. Considering the selection of seed material is at the same time a choice of entering in lucrative business of seed potato production.

Selection of Seed Material

Field research showed that only a few households in Kühistoni Mastchoh communities actually had elite seed potatoes available. Large parts of the interviewed farmer made experiences earlier, but were rather sceptical towards these seeds today. By itself, selecting and purchasing the appropriate seed material requires from the single household considerable efforts, expert considerations and eventually long term investments. Each variety contains specific

economic challenges and inherent risks. Key to success is good and trustworthy seed potato material which is difficult to choose and not always available. Local seed potatoes are mainly bought or bartered by subsistence farmers with acquaintances in nearby villages. Despite the very low reproduction rate, independent lorry drivers [*kamazistyi*] often buy or barter local seed potatoes to sell them in the lower parts of the Zarafshan area, e.g. in Panjakent district. Under the conditions of Kūhistoni Mastchoh, full market oriented production on the basis of local seed potatoes is hardly possible because the results usually fit just subsistence needs. Thus, these seeds are selected by households with small arable land plots available, who usually receive substantial parts of their income from elsewhere.

Another option are imported seed potatoe sorts as *pakistanez*, *gallanda*, *condor*, *picasa*, *romanzyi* that bring safe and stable results, but will only provide a moderate productivity growth in comparison to the local potato variety. Small and medium farmers use these seed potatoes very much in order to produce table potatoes for the market. Especially the sort *pakistanez* is often available and farmers know it very well. In the first year the reproduction rate is likely to be the double of the local sort, although farmers state that this ratio later sharply drops. Still, this provides safety for planning at least for the first two years and the household can count for a surplus to sell or barter. Common knowledge has it that the imported seed potatoes, especially the sort from Pakistan contain nematodes and is “contaminated by GMO” (Madrushkat 21.06.2011).¹⁰⁹ Farmers recognized that

¹⁰⁹ Rumours had it that important families linked to the government are involved in the import business of the Pakistani seed material to Tajikistan (Dushanbe 21.06.2011). This would explain the generally good availability of these seeds on local markets. It was common belief that *pakistanez* seeds are genetically modified organisms (GMO).

reproducing *pakistanez* seed material for longer than 3 years is impossible. Apparently it is a hybrid variety, where seeds cannot be reproduced arbitrary (Madrushkat 21.06.2011).

With respect to yields and seed reproduction, elite and super-elite seeds as well as their locally re-produced offspring of the first or second generation might technically be the best choice. These seeds are imported and reproduced through the Potato Seed Association PAKM. Members of PAKM are in charge of reproducing the imported seed potatoes several times and may then sell their produce. For being a PAKM potato seed multiplier, the household must resort to a strong economic basis, i.e. access to sufficient arable land, as this requires “crop rotation, disease clean fields, and obeying the pyramid of seed production [i.e. breeding rules, A.M.]” (Revomutk 27.06.2011). Thus PAKM members are almost always part of the village elites. Furthermore, a full programme of agricultural expertise is attached to these seeds for which PAKM offers a training curriculum to its members. So, reproducing elite seed material and selling both, seed and table potatoes, appears to be potentially the best solution for households in Kūhistoni Mastchoh, however is neither suitable nor available for ordinary farmers. In fact, there is high request of elite seed potatoes, either for the reproduction of seeds or table potato production. Reproducing seeds is a long term business, as with every season only a certain proportion is sold. Profits are higher in the long run, dispersed over years. Selling all seed potatoes at a good price at once yields immediately immense profits, although it ends the long term system of the pyramid of seed production. The conditions of high demand have contributed to an opaque distribution practice of elite potato seed material in Kūhistoni Mastchoh. Elite seed potatoes are apparently circulated among PAKM members who belong to local elite households. High quality elite seeds arrive to a

lower degree at relatives, village notables and other farmers from the sub-region. The very selective availability caused distrust and anger among the village community, because due to shortage of supply many requests were not served. However, local outrage peaked when eventually available elite seed material failed to perform as expected. Several smallholder farmers reported a complete loss of their seasonal harvest (upper Zarafshan 29.06.2011). Local farmers had various explanations for why their crops failed. Since it is not easily possible to distinguish seed potato varieties by just seeing and touching them, many smallholders are convinced that the “good seed potatoes from Germany are exchanged or mixed with bad regional seed potatoes. How can I see from the potato which variety or quality it is?” (upper Zarafshan 05.07.2011). It is reasonable that farmers do not have much confidence in the certificates of origin of potato seeds as these may be falsified too. Those farmers who had seen their cultivation fail, mentioned that they were constrained to sow *pakistanez* seeds afterwards to have at least some results for this season. Such failures of elite seeds deriving from PAKM were widely known in the sub-region. Commonly it was believed that PAKM exchanged the potato seeds in the storehouses [*tsharor*] and sold bad local seeds instead. „Money is scheduled into the pockets of certain thief-farmers. No one knows what happens in the storehouse! They take the good seeds only for themselves” (upper Zarafshan 05.07.2011). Hence, after negative experiences, the reputation of elite seeds is rather biased. In fact, the option to cultivate elite seeds has often been ruled out by smallholders as these seeds caused a risk to their livelihood, in particular as these farmers often do potato monocultures. A considerable number of farmers frankly declined to use them and work with local varieties, *pakistanez* or other medium varieties instead (upper Zarafshan 12.06.2012, 14.06.2011).

Contested Expertise

It is beyond doubt that elite seeds, either for reproduction or as table potatoes, require professional treatment in order to provide best results. For obtaining optimal yields, a strict regime of crop rotation is necessary, precise sowing and the application of the right amount of fertilizer with the right timing. These conditions are rarely met by smallholder farmers who lack sufficient resources to finance long term innovation processes. Smallholder households are constrained to keep all possible natural resources in use during cropping season, which often means maintaining potato monocultures for livelihood means. Beside this, the household needs to hold available the capacity to organize the required labour, to provide additional inputs as fertilizer and potentially pesticides. Furthermore storage and commercialization capacities are required. A very few households in the Zarafshan Valley were actually technically able to respond to such challenges and thus to engage fully in professional potato and potato seed production. In consequence, at time of the field research this led to a bias of mainly economically potent households being active members of PAKM who engaged in professional seed production. Rejecting accusations of fraud around the distribution of elite seed material, PAKM members who are part and parcels of the village elite indicated the lack of knowledge and experience of smallholder farmers that had caused crop failures. Indeed, many of local smallholder farmers throughout the Zarafshan Valley acknowledged difficulties in ensuring the required crop rotation¹¹⁰, provision of sufficient fertilizer or correct cultivation. An external expert working for an international NGO in the Zarafshan Valley summarizes: “Farmers have no money, no capacities to ensure crop rotation. And

¹¹⁰ To increase the quality of soils, crop rotation schedules annual shifts with legumes as lucerne, beans and others.

they simply do not earn with Lucerne and Beans” (Madrushkat 29.06.2011). One particularly disputed argument was the technique of cutting the seed material. Some farmer cut the potato seed one or two times, thus the material is tripled or quadrupled and costs significantly reduced.



Photograph 8 Cutting germinated seed potatoes of local variety. Brown spots in the centre indicate the poor quality of seeds. Source: The author.

External agronomists state that such a treatment will indeed reduce the performance of seeds; however it is not entirely unreasonable practice (Panjakent 13.04.2012). For the sake of maximal productivity, elite seeds shall not be cut, when used for seed reproduction. However, cutting seeds for table potato production seems technically not a problem and economically justified. It belongs to farmers' local expertise to calculate the potential loss in productivity against the reduction of investment costs for seed material. One mid-aged elite farmer, member of the potato seed association PAKM explained: "Cutting seeds, yes is practiced, but you shall not do it. If the sort is adapted to local conditions after 3 to 4 years, maybe yes. However, only table potatoes [may be cut, A.M.], not for seeds" (Madrushkat 15.06.2012). With regard to the above mentioned failure of elite seed material, local elite farmer and PAKM members refer to the issue of cutting seeds to create

doubts about smallholders capacities to deal with elite seed material. Crop failure and shortcomings are quickly linked to the incompetence of the respective individual farmer (upper Zarafshan 18.06.2011).

Failure of Agricultural Expertise

As a consequence, a considerable number of local farmers refused to request elite seeds material and to opt instead for other available seeds. Given the restricted availability together with local farmers' negative experiences which did not match with the statements of alleged productivity of the PAKM elite seeds, the majority of farmers, i.e. local smallholder, deliberately remain with the local and medium seed potatoes. These are in terms of productivity second best, but nevertheless imply reliable investment and guarantee livelihoods. Although farmers are well aware of the potentials of elite seed material, there risk not to receive the right seeds, cannot be ruled out. In consequence, most smallholder farmers arranged themselves with a mix of medium and local seeds which are modest towards soil requirements. Despite the high request for fertilizer and providing only satisfying results, such disadvantages of local seeds are considered against the risk of total loss caused by ill-working elite seeds. "I have reservations against PAKM seeds. I prefer to get seeds from neighbours and from other villages" (upper Zarafshan 12.06.2012) said a younger smallholder farmer.

Even though medium farmers try to catch up with commercial production, in the case of potato production in Kūhistoni Mastchoh they mainly do this by investing in the second best seed material to maintain general risks of economic failure at a tolerable level. Decisions regarding potential efficiency innovations are rather simple: "I cannot do crop rotation; I need the money every year" states a poor farmer in the upper Zarafshan Valley (05.07.2011).

Farmers primarily interest in obtaining optimal results is limited by the obligation of reducing risks to the household's livelihood as much as possible. From this perspective, the option of elite seeds is dismissed as the attached risks are considered incalculable by smallholder households. Dwelling into the rational of local seed selection reveals how utterly complex and unsecure the available knowledge is. The narrative linear yield increase told by elite farmers is misleading, because smallholder farmer have no guaranteed access to elite seeds. Reliable information on elite seed material is not available unless strong personal bonds are made with elite circles of the potato association PAKM. It is in this regard that especially for smallholder farmer's this particular expertise has become problematic. Smallholder households have very little chances to verify reliable and trustworthy information about issues that are partly above the local level as the imported seed material. At the same time, local domains of knowledge and expertise are also contested – as the cutting of seed material indicates. This makes it very difficult for smallholder farmer to make definite long term decisions, as would be required for professionalizing potato seed production. Since there is no reliable knowledge broker acting as interface between local production and regional commercialization, farmers arrange with the *status quo* and abandon investments in innovation. The selection process of the seed potatoes shows the high degree of uncertainty around agricultural knowledge and agricultural expertise. Knowledge assets are considered not reliable and leave farmers uncertain with regard to decision making. In consequence, the investment in elite seed material is cancelled and farmer deliberately arrange with low quality local seeds. Thus, the example underlines that trust is an essential criterion in Zarafshani farmers approach to expertise and knowledge sharing. Especially smallholder households face

difficulties to validate knowledge and making subsequent investments in agricultural production.

Considering the Dehqon Farm

The following part describes farmers' considerations regarding the founding of the individual or family *dehqon* farm. This case corroborates the conceptual individualization of agriculture as a long term process in Tajikistan that refers especially to individual production, but is separated from the actual privatization of agriculture. The push towards individualized farm enterprises dates back to early state reform efforts to restructure local agricultural enterprises as described in the previous chapter. However, the implementation of these reform efforts was realized only recently since about the end of 2015 due to increased political pressure from the state government and international partners. However, before that date, despite farmers' general interest in changing their status from member of the collective *dehqon* farm to becoming a legally independent producer, the conditions for this process were rather negative. Information and advice regarding this transition appeared incalculable. Thus, for the time of the field research the privatization of farm enterprises in the Zarafshan Valley was protracted and the majority of farmers abstained from this potentially household consolidating opportunity. By the end of 2012 the vast majority of Zarafshani farm households were individually producing and economically independent, however formally still part of the local collective *dehqon* farm. Individual or family *dehqon* farms, as completely private enterprises, were very rare in the Zarafshan Valley with merely a few such farms per community (Mandler 2016). Table 6 below shows the distribution of individual or family *dehqon* farms in the mainly visited villages of the research area at the end 2012.

District	Villages	Inhabitants per village	Number of hh	Approx. number of individual or family ¹¹¹ <i>dehqon</i> farms
Kühistoni Mastchoh	Padask	520	91	2
Kühistoni Mastchoh	Madrushkat	952	174	1
Kühistoni Mastchoh	Revomutk	820	124	2
Ayni	Soosun	2658	518	3
Panjakent	Garibak	2939	721	4
Panjakent	Chinor	1896	347	3

Table 6 Individual or family *dehqon* farms in the research communities at the end of 2012. Source: Author's compilation based on Welthungerhilfe, DFID et al. (2008), own calculations and the *jamoat* statistic office.

At that time, in all mentioned communities collective *dehqon* farms prevailed, which legally assembled the majority of farm households of the community. Figures in the Zarafshan Valley significantly changed only in 2016, when the government exercised considerable pressure on district administrative bodies to register also smallholder assets as *dehqon* farms.¹¹² However, the above figures display the previously low numbers of individual and family *dehqon* farms (Mandler 2016). At time of the field research 2011 and 2012 many farmers considered the setup of the individual or family

¹¹¹ The two family *dehqon* farms that were found during field research in the Zarafshan Valley comprised three households, i.e. parents and the households of two sons.

¹¹² I.e. farm households with less than 1,5ha of arable land available.

dehqon farm as a future project (Bakozoda et al. 2011: 7, 32f; Tajik Farm Diary 2013), without undertaking concrete steps. Actually, it became clear during the interviews with local farmers that only very few people knew how to start the administrative procedure and had an idea about the involved procedures and costs. A majority of farmers recognized the investment in the privatized *dehqon* farm as desirable and necessary for the near future, however faced great difficulties to access reliable information to base decisions on it. The parallel presence of various farm enterprises and distinctively of low numbers of individual and family *dehqon* farms in the Zarafshan area at the time revealed exactly the lack of quality knowledge that stopped farmer from making investments. In the elevated districts of Ayni and Kūhistoni Mastchoh, reluctance towards organising the household as individual or family *dehqon* farm was commonplace. Only wealthy and powerful households, e.g. those with more than average access to irrigated high quality land, had started certifying land plots and registering their request for an individual or family *dehqon* farm enterprise. The fully privatized farm seemed to be in all visited communities a project of local elites. Usual smallholder farmer postponed the issue as mid or long-term target, mainly because they were far below the commonly believed threshold of 1.5 hectares.¹¹³ Generally, there was immense uncertainty sensible regarding details and concrete steps to the setup the own *dehqon* farm. Despite interest in the project, confusion, deliberate misinformation and the lack of information characterized the local perception of the individual or family *dehqon* farm. From the perspective of Zarafshani farmers, no clarity about the actual

¹¹³ Sub-regionally the assumption changed between 1 and 1,5ha of farm land necessary to found the *dehqon* farm. Such figures were repeated by the district administration. These appear as sub-regionally imposed rules; literature and the legal framework do not specify the minimal amount of land necessary to found the *dehqon* farm (Caccavale 2005).

conditions to found and maintain the *dehqon* farm could be found. Evidence provides the survey of Bakozoda et al. illustrating that only very few farmers were actually informed about the concrete process of how to set up an individual or family *dehqon* farm, i.e. which documents are necessary and which offices need to be approached (2011:45f). Media as sources of information were hardly available, and worse, statements by the president and the MoA are hardly specific. Equally, administration and state institutions on sub-district [*jamoat*] and district levels [*nohiya*] were poorly prepared and even unwilling to foster the registration of new *dehqon* farms, thus denying their responsibility. A senior farmer, part of the local elite and well connected even with the capital Dushanbe, stated:

“It is good when you manage to do it [to set up the dehqon farm], to eventually arrange it. The government promotes it, the president and the media talk about it. However, the hukumat [on district and sub-regional level] has to do it without money. Therefore they have no interest and are reluctant to deal with the requests. They simply don’t care” (Madrushkat 12.06.2012).

This way the midlevel administration was bluntly trapped in between the incongruence of national policies and realities at local level. Panjakent’s *agroprom* [district agricultural department] found itself unable to provide farmers with advice how to implement *dehqon* farm as it had no directives regarding required farm sizes prepared. *Agroprom* staff indicated that the centrally designated form of the private *dehqon* farm did not fit with the conditions found in this district. With reference to the assumed lack of profitability a senior *agroprom* officer outlined the office’s reluctance to start registering *dehqon* farms in this district:

“Yes [we advise people who want to become individual dehqon farmer], but there are very few. People cannot become dehqon farmer with just 6 soti of land. It is not viable to do so. There will be no profit, just costs such as pension schemes and taxes. Such farms are too small for efficient work. Agricultural machinery cannot be used efficiently, due to the small size of arable areas. [...] Families may work on their land, but 6 soti is work for only 10 days” (Panjakent 09.08.2011).

Such statements provide a good explanation for the selective presence of state organizations in rural areas. The lack of communication and support from the centre leaves the district administration virtually paralysed.¹¹⁴ It is therefore no matter of course for state organizations to provide a statement to agricultural policies at all. In Kūhistoni Mastchoh district, it was widely believed that certifying land means automatically being eligible to an individual *dehqon* farm; thus falling under another taxation scheme. Private individual or family *dehqon* farm enterprises are subject to elevated taxes and increased payments for social benefits, i.e. the pension fund and a minimum wage scheme.¹¹⁵ However, although the administrative bodies of the *jamoat* and *hukumat* were in charge of registering the new *dehqon* farms, they were not able to provide clear information on these issues.

¹¹⁴ Later, upon political requests from the central government for sub-regionally higher numbers of individual *dehqon* farms, the district administration removed the obstacle of the required minimal size of land by abandoning the 1,5ha regulation (Mandler 2016).

¹¹⁵ Separate payments for the pension fund and minimum wage scheme are due for each employee and member of the household above 18 years.

Registration Procedures, Involved Costs and the Impossibility to Invest

Caccavale (2005: 7) describes the administrative procedure to set up an individual or family *dehqon* farm in Tajikistan as formalized process of eight steps. It goes without saying that this procedure is easily protracted through additional financial requests from local authorities. From the perspective of farmers, the administrative procedure to arrive at the individual *dehqon* farm looked rather confuse, involving incalculable costs. Farmers repeatedly mentioned high initial costs required to establish an individual or family *dehqon* farm. The necessary investments appear as serious obstacle for starting the private farming business. Such calculations, however, have to be seen in context of the generally unclear procedure. The entire calculation may easily double and triple explains an energetic medium farmer who managed to access additional land.

“You need stamps, documents, registrations – this alone makes 1000 Somoni [ca. 155€]. Some of these papers are only in Khujand available. Further, you need one stamp that is only available in Dushanbe. You need a bank account. All in all 2600 Somoni [ca. 403€] are needed. The tax department doesn’t know what to do. For this little land [referring to ca. 1 hectare, A.M.] it is not worth the efforts” (Garibak 28.04.2012).

In order to obtain the necessary documents, it is obvious that extra costs are involved. A range of documents, certifications, stamps and expert consultations is necessary – on *jamoat*, district and even on national level. This mandatory documentation consumes immense amounts of time and money as it has to be requested from notoriously slow and underfunded state authorities (Bliss 2011; Boboyorov 2016). It is common knowledge and *de facto* praxis that bribes and extra benefits need to be provided to the administration

as “[b]ureaucracy and vested interests permeate the whole process” (Caccavale 2005: 7). Being dependent on the collaboration of the administrative bodies, farmers have little leverage to avoid unlawful extra payments. Eventually, farmers know such procedures very well. One young medium farmer, who complained about pending administrative issues, reported:

“You pay 2000 Somoni [ca. 310€] for certification. The price is the same from 1 to 5 hectare. The full sum goes to the raïs of the land committee. He divides between jamoat and hukumat. The rest is for him. If you pay, the process is fast, otherwise slow” (upper Zarafshan 17.06.2011).

Such investments require financial resources and sustained organizational efforts that many farmers are not able or not willing to take up.¹¹⁶ Financial resources theoretically are available from remittances; however there are principle difficulties to invest in the smallholder farm in the Zarafshan area. Interestingly, remittances from labour migration are rarely being invested in realizing the individual or family *dehqon* farm, as the project is simply not being considered profitable in the short run. Especially, as it is *virtually* impossible to invest in additional arable land. While some better off farmers acknowledged that buying land is potentially possible, smallholder farmers stated: “You cannot buy land. Even if you come home from Russia with 10’000\$ you cannot buy land” (upper Zarafshan 18.06.2011).

Calculating the costs involved in individual and family *dehqon* farming made most small and medium farm households in the Zarafshan Valley opt to remain as long as possible under the umbrella of the collective *dehqon* farm. Both local administration and farmers appeared to have very low incentives to shift the

¹¹⁶ Loans from financial institutions or NGO are potentially available, although contain immense interest rates of around 30% per annum.

present farm status. One better off farmer from the lower Zarafshan Valley summarizes:

“Right now, being in the collective dehqon farm Shamsi Nasarov is better for me. The tax for 1 sakhm is 50 Somoni [ca. 7.75€] per year. For arenda land [leasehold land] it is 32 Somoni [ca. 4.96€] per sotiqlik per year. The money is paid to the rais [chief] of the dehqon farm or to the brigadier either monthly or at the end of the year. I can pay in kind if I want” (Garibak, 01.05.2012).

Regarding payments, there are ostensibly no incentives to leave the collective *dehqon* farm. Only households which are convinced of future sales and business may take the risk of higher taxes. Parts of tax payments have to be provided in advance, every month at least 15 *Somoni* [ca. 2.32€] to the district administration [*nohiya*]. On top of this there would be the necessary pension fund contributions, minimal wages and increased costs for water and energy. Farmers in Garibak village reported that for individual and family *dehqon* farms increased input costs for electricity and irrigation are due (09.07.2011). Especially in the eyes of most smallholder farmers, the sum of such extra costs shifts the cost-benefit ratio of the *dehqon* farm project into the negative. “It is better to stay in the collective *dehqon* farm at the moment. Taxes per year are 40 *Somoni* [ca. 6.20€] of unified standard tax per *sakhm* [land plot of 6 *sotiqlik*] that’s all” (Garibak 28.04.2012). The real costs for the individual *dehqon* farm are hardly to calculate and farmers know by experience that operational costs are likely to increase. Another point adding to uncertainty are further collateral costs. One medium farmer explains: “The *hukumat* will force you to take part in stupid meetings, you need to contribute in kind to all kinds of gatherings and subscribe to several government newspapers” (lower Zarafshan 28.04.2012). Such events cost time and money as the household is

obliged to contribute in one or another form. For this reason, another retired farmer advised his sons not to set up a private farm at the moment, because “the [individual or family] *dehqon* farms were asked to contribute to the new fountain in Panjakent, to pay for the construction of the [*Roghun*] dam,¹¹⁷ to take over silk worm rearing in spring and the like more” (lower Zarafshan 08.05.2012). As the above example of pressure on meat prices show, state interferences in business are serious and cause strong risks to the livelihood of smallholder households. Against this background, farmers explained bluntly that for the time being it was much better to remain member of the collective *dehqon* farm as this means fewer expenses and less interference with government representatives. The above mentioned medium farmer from the lower Zarafshan concludes: “So far it is not clever to leave the collective *dehqon* farm as there are too many costs and unintended interventions involved if you are an individual *dehqon* farmer” (08.05.2012).

Summary: Crisis of Expertise

The cases illustrated the crisis of agricultural expertise in the Zarafshan Valley. The individualization of agriculture had a significant impact on the presence and quality of knowledge in the Zarafshan Valley. Previously centralized knowledge and information structures deteriorated and are today only sporadically in modified forms available. Therefore, as a consequence, agricultural expertise that is linked to organizations, i.e. as in the case of the district

¹¹⁷ The national campaign to donate for the construction of the Roghun dam turned into compulsory levy for state employees, business men and other citizens with a supposedly above-average income. Private *dehqon* farmer are considered to belong to the latter group. The district administration and other state representatives required so called voluntary contributions of a full annual salary (Wikileaks 2010; Ergasheva 2010; Eurasianet 2010).

agroprom, is of disputable quality and poorly requested. Large swaths of agricultural expertise shifted from formerly public or semi-public domains to the local level of individualized farm households. However, shifting sources of agricultural expertise are only one part of the transformation of knowledge in the Zarafshan Valley. The individualization of agricultural production in the Zarafshan Valley caused also suspicion regarding the quality of information. The examples of seed potato selection and farmers' considerations regarding the private *dehqon* farm underlined that many sources of agricultural expertise and advice are not considered reliable. Thus, a trusted relation to the source of knowledge is considered essential, as otherwise knowledge and information is hardly being implemented nor guides farmers operations. In consequence, the examples outline the transformation of rural epistemic cultures in the Zarafshan Valley, where not only sources of specialized knowledge change, but also the quality of expertise itself. Thus, farmers are required to inform themselves differently. Due to the generally difficult natural, economic and political environment to farming in the Zarafshan area, many households do not consider agriculture as the principal livelihood strategy anymore. Instead non-agricultural knowledge assets are requested to verify agricultural expertise, dealing with meshwork governance and the assemblage of political and economic processes in the realm of agriculture. Thus, farmers focus on other knowledge assets, poorly request expertise and remain reluctant to base decisions and investments on it.

7 *Negotiating Normative Systems: Bobogi Access Arrangements*

This chapter exemplifies how a central issue for agricultural production, access to arable land, is negotiated in the Zarafshan Valley. Legally access to land is regulated by the Tajik land code. State organizations are in charge to implement and observe land reform legislation; however the respective authorities are only selectively present on local level. This means in the Zarafshan Valley that important for instance decisions regarding the access to land are not only taken in the framework of the land code, but also in different other forums under diverse normative signatures. Parallel and overlapping governance processes have some negative effects, i.e. unequal distribution of land, competition and conflicts among rural households and subsequently a high number of poor households.¹¹⁸ In the context of considerations regarding the potential foundation of the individual or family *dehqon* farm, the race for assets to land has further exacerbated. Due to the absent land market and officially finished land reform, which coerce any requests for land to follow subcutaneous strategies, Tajikistan is considered a case of limited access order (LAO). To realize access to additional land, farmers refer to many different organizations, institutions and processes, which are settled in different normative systems.

This chapter outlines the presence of diverse normative systems in the Zarafshan Valley that structure local access to land and natural resources. Firstly, the example of *bobogi* arrangements is singled

¹¹⁸ See Table 4 above. Especially the few extraordinary large estates that came to existence in a number of communities lead to massive discontent. Basically, each village visited had a few households with large land plots, way above local average, at disposal.

out to discuss how normative systems determine local access to arable land. So called *bobogi* claims have been, and occasionally still are, in the Zarafshan Valley a common way to claim land on the basis of former belonging. The notion of *bobogi* refers to the previous ownership of a particular land plot and subsequently to claim its restitution. *Bobogi* arrangements have been important and widespread throughout the Zarafshan Valley especially in the 1990's and 2000's. *Bobogi* arrangements are not considered in the land reform legislation. They are partially disputed in local communities; however claim legitimacy from representing local values and moralities. The second part of the chapter argues that in the Zarafshan Valley at least three different normative systems can be identified which are brought forward in local governance processes: Norms related to Islam, norms related to the state and its organizations and norms derived from local values and moralities. Looking at access negotiation processes shows that there are various institutions, organizations and processes that offer governance. However, these institutions, organizations and processes are in a competitive relation to each other, eventually delivering highly variable access arrangements. Against this finding, the chapter concludes that access negotiations emerge as local meshwork governance, which builds on and integrates different normative systems, eventually enabling strong governance arrangements. Earlier parts of this chapter have been published elsewhere (Mandler 2013, 2015).

Bobogi Access Arrangements: Values and Moralities

In the Zarafshan Valley, land distribution processes did not exclusively follow the land reform legislation. Instead local negotiations had an important impact on access arrangements too. The rationale of the various Tajik land reforms foresaw the division

of collective land among the former employees of the collective farm enterprises. However, local land arrangements insisted on the individual belonging of land plots. One example for the latter arrangements is called *bobogi*, which literally means ‘from the grandfather’. The term implies the restitution of arable land plots to the supposedly previous proprietors.¹¹⁹ *Bobogi* arrangements are known and were implemented not only in the Zarafshan area, but also elsewhere in Tajikistan.¹²⁰ The practice to re-claim the property of the ancestors is said to have started in the Zarafshan Valley during the late 1980s, when formerly resettled inhabitants returned from the northern low-land district Mastchohi Nav to their previous settlements in Kūhistoni Mastchoh districts (Zevaco 2014: 159ff).¹²¹ Former villagers and their descendants claimed that certain land plots were allegedly created or owned by their ancestors. On this basis massive land distribution occurred during the 1990s when re-migration to Kūhistoni Mastchoh district peaked and the newcomer claimed the restitution of former family property. Consequently, through the returning offspring of resettled families many villages in the Kūhistoni Mastchoh district observed considerable demographic gains. In recent years however, due to the end of land distribution on the part of the collective *dehqon* farm and severe shortage of land, the inflow of people has diminished. For example, farmer

¹¹⁹ *Bobogi* requests may also refer to houses and other property. However, in the Zarafshan area the term was almost always used with regard to arable land.

¹²⁰ Comparable legendary stories of grandfathers involved in the distribution of land were reported also in Shahritus district, south Tajikistan, in April 2012.

Supposedly, the institution *bobogi* is called differently in other parts of Tajikistan, e.g. *azhdody* – from the ancestors, *bibigi* – from the grandmother. The elaborations in this chapter refer mainly to the Kūhistoni Mastchoh district.

¹²¹ Similar to other mountainous valleys, the inhabitants of Kūhistoni Mastchoh were during the Soviet Union focrefully resettled to uninhabited lowland areas in 1950’s and 60’s in order to cultivate cotton. The settlement area was in the northern lowlands of the Sughd province and was named Mastchohi Nav: The new Mastchoh. There, new settlements with identical names as in the mountainous Mastchoh were founded (Zevaco 2014).

Abdukosir, who returned to the Zarafshan Valley in 1992 together with other young men from Mastchohi Nav district¹²², explained: “It was our wish to come back to *vatani bobogi* [the homeland of the grandfathers]. We asked the *hokim* [district governor] for land and he gave us the land” (upper Zarafshan 18.06.2012).¹²³ He admits that they had no documents or evidence of proof regarding their right to request certain land plots. People knew the family names, thus “local inhabitants didn’t say anything; they just returned the land of our grandfathers to us” (upper Zarafshan 18.06.2012). Nevertheless, there is actually no legal basis for *bobogi* requests. In the early 2000 years, the Kūhistoni Mastchoh district administration [*hukumat*] based in Mehron village issued the order 201 [*ukas, farmo*] not to consider *bobogi* requests anymore (Madrushkat 13.06.2012). However, *bobogi* requests continued to be dealt in different forums at various levels; locally, at district and even at national level. Important actors in the process decide about – and eventually implement – the distribution of land, such as the local *raísi hodshagi dehqonon*, e.g. the chief of local collective *dehqon* farm¹²⁴, the *jamoat* land committee at municipality level and the *hokim* himself at district level. Requests were also communicated through village institutions, such as mosques, local committees and the board of elders. In some villages, requests for land were discussed at the *majlisi umumi*, the grand village meeting.

¹²² The young men deliberately chose their wives from the village of their forefathers with the intention to better integrate into local society.

¹²³ Young people from Mastchohi Nav were sent by their families to live in Kūhistoni Mastchoh. There they issued requests on the previously possessed houses and arable land. Nowadays, people from Kūhistoni Mastchoh do the same when they send some of their sons to settle in Zafarobod in the northern plains of Tajikistan.

¹²⁴ The chief of the local collective *dehqon* farm was elected on un-limited terms. If people wanted the chief to leave office, they request a meeting [*maclisi umumi*] and vote for a successor candidate. It was no anomaly to find chiefs of collective farms that were in charge since 20 years and more.

Nevertheless, the *raís* of the local *dehqon* farm and the district governor, the *hokim*, apparently had decisive influence on *bobogi* decisions. These actors dealt with the practical implementation of the request, i.e. eventually the local *raís* was in charge of granting access to land. *Bobogi* requests basically referred to the name of the family and its public acquaintance, as it was almost impossible to bring evidence in the form of documents. One elder farmer explains:

“Old people know very well where the land plots are and how they were distributed. This information [regarding family land property] is passed through the generations. No documents were available or necessary. They [the board of elders] unite and discuss and finally decide unanimously”
(Soosun 28.06.2012).

The board of elders approves the legitimacy of *bobogi* claims. This institutional level may have been sufficient in most requests, so that the community ceded access to the respective household. Local communities align the institution of *bobogi* with common values, such as: Land is the private good of the family; one has to respect the ancestors, those who created the land plot should use it and so on. These principles reflect the common sense in the community and are hardly contradicted. Additionally, the spiritual attachment to the inherited family land is frequently emphasized and, in the sense of reference to the hard work of the forefathers and the divinity of the agricultural livelihood, it forms an argument of its own. Talking with two experienced farm advisers from the Zarafshan Valley, both underline that even during Soviet times land tenure patterns did not change:

“Bobogi land distribution is in place in the whole Mastchoh¹²⁵ district. It is permitted and fair, as it was also in place during the time of the kolkhoz. People officially rendered their land to the kolkhoz; unofficially they continued to work their family land and paid taxes. [...] It is better that the law on land reform is not implemented here as it means civil war [...]. In Mastchoh you can’t do anything. How can you take from one and give to others?” (Ayni 22.06.2011).

Due to the harsh environmental conditions, in most cases arable land plots had to be made cultivable from dry and uneven mountain slopes. Thus, parts of the legitimacy of present days *bobogi* requests derives from the physical efforts of the grandfathers who created the land by levelling it, providing topsoil and irrigation. Legends of smart and hard-working grandparents are very popular among villagers. Such building stories apparently back the strong narrative of *bobogi* that is virtually shared by the majority of people in the Zarafshan area. I will come back to this point further below as this argument implies also a reference to religious values.

Habitual Land Use and the Legacy of the Grand Parents

Linking land plots with the own family history entails high legitimacy of access claims. In Kūhistoni Mastchoh district *bobogi* requests refer either to a time right before the forced resettlement around 1956, which would refer to already a situation of collectivized agriculture.¹²⁶ Or it refers to pre-Soviet property structures before

¹²⁵ In the local perception, the term Mastchoh indicates the whole area of the upper Zarafshan Valley, more or less starting after the city of Ayni.

¹²⁶ The collectivization of agriculture in the Zarafshan Valley took place during the 1940's. There is a small museum maintained in Soosun village to remember a clerical from a local sacred family who was shot by the Soviets as *basmach*i in the course of the collectivisation.

circa 1920, thus about three generations ago? Both explanations are problematic. The first one would refer to a time of collective agriculture when officially only marginal private land plots were allowed (Eisener 1999; Rogowin 2006). The latter explanation points to a time period before 1920, thus more than 90 years ago, when the grandparents were infants. Furthermore, this disguises important changes that followed from Soviet policies between 1920 and 30's as well as the subsequent period of central farming and planning with its effect on land plots, irrigation and soils (Eisener 1999). This implies that the reference of farmers in Mastchoh to their forefathers and ancestors not necessarily links to well-defined pre-Soviet property structures, but instead to a continuum of family business in the community. In fact, not all claimants of *bobogi* family land were able to claim particular plots built by their grandfathers, instead were satisfied with any suitable land available (Revomutk 18.06.2012). This implies that the institutions implicitly rest on a broader concept based on an "identity group coupled with private plots owned by a father and his sons (even married), which has been inherited from the past, [and that] has been repeated within the *kolkhoz* system" (Roy 1999: 113ff). Roy's finding corroborates the structures found in the Zarafshan Valley today as mentioned in the quote above. Farmers, at least partially, maintained a sense of belonging through the continuance of land and property use during Soviet collective agriculture and post-Soviet privatization. While former land tenure of grandparents may be questionable, the current, habitual and everyday connection with land plots is not. Similar to family legacy, farmers underline habitual use to support access claims for land. Such claims are corroborated by the personal efforts and inputs made throughout the *kolkhoz* and post-*kolkhoz* period. Thus, for example, an apricot gardener successfully claimed land use rights of the former *kolkhoz* fruit

garden where he worked all his life (mid Zarafshan 11.06.2011). Similarly managed the former employees of a weather station in another village to maintain control over the adjoin land (upper Zarafshan 14.06.2012). Thus, plausible requests for land can be developed through narratives mixing family history and habitual use (Boboyorov 2013a: 137ff, 197ff; 2016; Roy 1999). The following brief account of the arrival of the Russian teacher in an upper Zarafshani village sheds light on how *bobogi* arrangements are still infiltrated in community affairs today.

Intersection: Mualimi Russi and his Wife

The new Russian teacher [*mualimi russi*] came two years ago from Mastchohi Nav district where he grew up to this village. He works two hectare of land and garden as bobogi from his family, i.e. land that he took with reference to his grandparents as previous proprietors. Actually, the land was used by his sister, but taken from her, also because her husband is not present in the village. The neighbour who informs us on the story of *mualimi russi* underlines that the sisters' children are now without land. Accepting the request for bobogi land was an exception, says the school director, because the village needed a Russian teacher. His wife in Mastchohi Nav did not want to move to this village. Therefore he found himself a second wife in the city of Panjakent. The new wife, who arrived together with her children, thought this village was a city, just like Panjakent. Her first husband is in Russia and did not call since the children were born (upper Zarafshan 17.06.2011).



Photograph 9 The Panjakent wife with her daughter. Source: The author.

Conflict, Mistrust, Legitimization

Despite the actual period of *bobogi* arrangements in the 1990's and 2000 has been passed, the example of the Russian teacher shows that *bobogi* arrangements occasionally continue to happen. Acceptance for the institution of *bobogi* prevails in the Zarafshan area; however concrete *bobogi* requests are stirring up conflicts among villagers. While core values of *bobogi* is a family, homeland, hard work or the respect to forefathers are generally agreed, practical implications of *bobogi* are not easily accepted because they already created severe inequality of access to natural resources. Farmers are well aware that *bobogi* restitutions are contradicting state legislation and, if applied, affect individual and communal livelihoods. Additionally, rural dwellers understood that references to these values may be manipulated and contradictory. Many farmers questioned during informal conversations the legitimacy of *bobogi* arrangements, as they feel outsmarted by a few elite families within the community. The reference to the underage children deprived of their heritage in the case of *mualimi russi* provides evidence for farmers' sensitivity. However, as long as local elites favour particular arrangements, as expressed by the school director, alternative arrangements are still possible. Accordingly, some farmers linked *bobogi* to money, indicating that it is just a cover for corruption: "*Bobogi* comes with money" (Madrushkat 01.07.2011). For one farmer who earlier benefited from *bobogi* himself, it is just a means of additional income for elites. *Bobogi* requests are made up by powerful persons that are using the narrative to succeed in local governance processes and achieve implementation. Another young man who partially studies in Dushanbe and works on his parents' farm, expressed the way of manipulating arrangements as a long term project to accumulate power:

“You get bobogi by requesting it. Then you need pusht [background, A.M.]. Then you also need money, not to buy things but to appear important, to build your reputation of being boi [rich] and important. And then your word will have value, this allows you to speak” (upper Zarafshan 01.07.2011).

Thus, addressing the important and delicate issue of access to land requires skills and some kind of status-adjusted preparation to potentially realize success in access negotiations. It is common sense among farmers that governance processes are closed by elites and rigged by their interests. Depending on the situation in the locality, land access negotiations may be dominated by one elite group or subject of discussion in elite competitions. Respectively, smallholder farmers approach to such processes must be adequate. In the present context, this either means being ready to make payments or submitting to patronage networks. One smallholder farmer soberly summarizes the perspectives for *bobogi* requests in his community: “Of course it is not according to the law if I want land somewhere, but of course, I give the money and I get the land” (upper Zarafshan 05.07.2011). Due of such unlawful practices, that vividly contradict local values, the legitimacy of the institution *bobogi* has been repeatedly questioned throughout the Zarafshan Valley. Incoming claims today are considered usually as “not fair”, “painful” (Madrushkat 02.07.2011; 15.06.2012) and normally refused.¹²⁷ Questions are raised about the justice and fairness of land distribution that favours a few people, while “according to

¹²⁷ Such requests create discontent. The chief of the village *mahalla* committee somewhat bitterly summarized the matter: “There are people who request *bobogi*, but they are not getting it. It hurts a little bit, because we work hard and pay taxes and they come and want to take it. There are still coming people from Mastchohi Nav, but they just build some small houses like *datcha* [bungalow]. They stay only for some months here in summer” (upper Zarafshan 13.06.2012).

Islam all people should benefit equally from the land” (Revomutk 16.06.2011). In some communities farmers mentioned that also the local mullah spoke out against the legitimacy of *bobogi* arrangements (Revomutk 15.06.2011). Earlier, during the early post-Soviet transition period of the 1990’s, strong local institutions such as *bobogi* compensated these shortcomings by providing gradually security where otherwise insecurity prevailed. Especially in the years after national independence, this meant quite a lot as local forums that provided decisions and ensured their implementation changed frequently. *Bobogi* arrangements showed in this regard strength as they were decided, implemented and maintained. Eventually, to avoid questions about underhand dealings, in the course of the latest land reform many beneficiaries of *bobogi* arrangements have certified their land plots at the *jamoat* and district authorities and thus legalized their access rights. Subsequently, earlier *bobogi* land distributions cannot be questioned anymore.

Mobilizing Religion: Relating Bobogi Arrangements to Islam

Local rhetoric puts the institution of *bobogi* implicitly and explicitly next to Islamic justice and practice. However, households with only marginal access to land find it difficult to accept this argumentation. One young farmers’ critic refers to religion that in his perspective teaches equality: “What happens here is not according to Islam” (upper Zarafshan 16.06.2011). Religious values are substantially supported by villagers; however it is apparent that some references to Islam are simply used to support individual claims. Mistrust is voiced towards *bobogi* requests, because “people just say it, but they lie” says a young farmer from Madrushkat village (13.06.2012). It is commonly understood that sometimes individuals are using religious references just to enhance their private claims. Although

people find such bigotry inopportune, linking up with Islam is however an efficient support for own claims. This affirms the case of one powerful villager, who is considered rich and important as he used to be part of the Soviet nomenclature and who is active also today in different committees and boards in the village and at sub-regional level. Nobody in the village expressed much sympathy for him, allegedly because he is considered an unbeliever [*kofir*] whom one cannot trust: “Yes, he cites the Qur’an and prays at the end of the meal in Arabic, but it is a game, he knows the rules” (mid Zarafshan 11.06.2011). Thus, there is a clear sense for the possible manipulation of religious statements. The same way suspicion was articulated that *bobogi* decisions are in favour of persons coming from Mastchohi Nav because they are able to tell a “story” (Revomutk 28.06.2012). When talking about *bobogi* arrangements, the repeated reference to the alleged quality of the ancestors points in fact towards the manifestation of power by establishing a strong narrative. Presenting a plausible narrative in favour or against a particular request appears to be crucial for the involved parties. Highlighting the significance of the own ancestors and demonstrating individual religious determination contributes to establishing a powerful reputation within the community. The display of an orthodox lifestyle¹²⁸ appears convincing; it allows to question competitors’ relations to values and moralities especially, in particular as some the ostentatious strong believers are also economically successful.¹²⁹ The reason for that is the positive

¹²⁸ This means dressing in Afghan or Pakistan style, attending the mosque five times a day, being severe with household members and publicly following an Islamic lifestyle.

¹²⁹ Making Islamic lifestyle explicit is a strategy to deal with government bodies. Demonstrating the own dedication to Islam as a party member of the Islamic Renaissance Party or cultivating martial rhetoric’s or behaviour was at the time of the field research effective to somewhat scare off power organs (see: Dudoignon and Qalandar 2014; Zevaco 2014: 174).

narrative of the hard working family, right belief and prosperity holds true inversely. Land shortage and poverty are likely to be explained as results from personal or family shortcomings in the past. Not every household in the community was able to build successful *bobogi* requests on the aforementioned grandfathers. "Other people don't have *bobogi* land because their grandfather didn't work but slept" (Revomutk 18.06.2012). In Zarafshani communities, household poverty is likely attributed to grandfathers who played cards or contentious daughters in law¹³⁰ who fought with others instead of working. In this regard the reputation of a grandfather and the diligence of the respective family are highly important. Supposed laziness and gambling of grandfathers are important arguments during unfolding governance processes regarding access to certain plots of arable land. In this regard, poor households are not considered eligible for receiving *bobogi* land as the family is not up to common moralities. Poverty, and therewith unequal distribution of land, is explained deterministic. Talking with a better off farmer and bigoted layman indicates how adamant such negotiations are conducted on local level. "The poor are not poor, they go to Russia instead. They build big houses. You have to work, to think, to use the brain, then also 10 *sotiq* will be enough" (upper Zarafshan 18.06.2011). With reference to the claims of the poor farmers about unjustified land distribution, including his own large *bobogi* property, he continues: "May their face turn black! Who has no land owns livestock! Many people lie! *Rizq* [a concept of individual fortune and destiny in Islam] is everywhere the same, independent from owning 5 *sotiq* or 5 hectare" (upper Zarafshan 18.06.2011). Thus, eventually the unequal distribution of arable land is displayed as individual destiny. It is tangible how poverty and

¹³⁰ In the Zarafshan Valley the daughter in law *kelin*, moves into the household of the spouse where she is responsible of cooking, housekeeping, taking care of offsprings, lower field work etc.

poor people are stigmatized – and partially stigmatize themselves – as bad Muslims. Several times I observed how explicitly negative rhetoric and crude theories were employed to corroborate the unique role of Islam. Such discourses are called *amri mar'uf*. It starts mostly trivial to then link common phenomena with Islamic explanations. This works apparently well to frighten and pressure farmers to shift to a more religious daily life: “Why don’t Tajik people develop? Because Tajik people are bad; people here are no good believers” (upper Zarafshan 17.06.2012). The rhetoric to denounce the Tajik people or entire communities as bad Muslims, who are punished by God with severe living and working conditions, was an often heard statement, communicated by ordinary villagers, i.e. laymen, not the local mullahs. Talking randomly about religious affairs and linking them to daily life is called *amri ma'ruf* and became popular since the end of the Soviet Union.¹³¹ Due to the sheer daily workload or work outside the village, ordinary farmers and especially poor people do not manage to attend mosque service five times a day. Thus, they miss the opportunity to make individual religious practices explicit and fail the opportunity to establish an orthodox reputation.

These examples indicate already the interest of some actors to display the institution of *bobogi* as representation of Islamic orthodoxy, the basis of local values and moralities. Despite *bobogi* may lack a theological foundation, linkage to Islamic values is made through reference to the importance of ancestors in the popular understanding of Qur'an. *Bobogi* is considered as a legitimate representation of important Islamic values such as family, heritage

¹³¹ *Amri ma'ruf kardan* – laymen talk about the Qur'an in order to convince people about Islam. It is a try to proselytize, hastily campaigning for Islam, but without real convincing. In the Zarafshani sub-region some typical stories were circulating, e.g. scientific discoveries or future political developments already prescribed in the Qur'an. Some of these narrative topoi are often aggressive and partially beyond the limits of Tajik politeness (upper Zarafshan 28.06.2012).

and respect of the ancestors. These values are presented as consensual moralities (Stephan 2010) that shape everyday reality and constitute the local social order. The explicit reference to the grandfathers and the religiously accumulated respect towards ancestors leads to depicting *bobogi* as Islamic institution – which is hard to contest in rural areas. Thus, the extensive demonstration of religious values and lifestyle served many villagers to enhance and justify their individual claims. People, who sustained the institution of *bobogi*, presented themselves as severe Muslims, particularly attentive to Islamic daily routines, as the five-time per day religious services at the mosque. Distinctively pious individuals are very much present in today's village affairs and did benefit – in my perception – comparably more from *bobogi* arrangements than others. Emphasizing Islamic lifestyle helps to legitimize decisions, even retroactively, as practiced in the case of valuating grandfathers in the case of *bobogi* decisions. As above indicated, this refers to the many occasions in the village, where individual or collective action is commented mainly from a lay understanding of Islamic dogmatism [*amri mar'uf*], which turn out, with respect to governance processes, to be significant statements in today's village affairs.

Kalidi Islom

So to say, a maximum of clarity in resource governance processes was reached through the previous institution *kalidi Islom* [Tajik: Islamic key] which for a period determined local disputes. After Tajik national independence some communities adopted an arbitration procedure called *kalidi Islom*¹³² that was practiced in order to settle land disputes over access to land. Today, *kalidi Islom* is anecdotically remembered and appears to be outdated and not in use anymore. The institution *kalidi Islom* functioned to determine legitimate

¹³² Literally in Tajik: The key of Islam.

claims; particularly in contradicting *bobogi* cases where different ancestors were said to have been the cultivators of the respective piece of land. Thus, *kalidi Islom* and *bobogi* are closely related to each other. Both institutions were not just local phenomena, but known also elsewhere in Tajikistan (Sayyod 29.03.2012). *Kalidi Islom* started a procedure to decide true and justified *bobogi* claims. The procedure *kalidi Islom* entailed that the protagonists, i.e. the *bobogi* claimants for the same piece of land, are asked to each hold a key tied into the book of *Yoshin* of Qur'an with one finger, as displayed in the figure below.



Photograph 10 Re-enacting the procedure of *kalidi Islom*. Source: The author.

Whilst holding the book and repeating prayers of the book of *Yoshin*, the piece of land went to whom the Qur'an finally turned its front side. Although much criticized and sometimes refused by villagers, the procedure was practiced throughout the Zarafshan Valley. As a strict religious practice, *kalidi Islom* permitted immediate interference in land use disputes; because the ordained rationale was hard to contest.¹³³ It derived legitimacy from being an

¹³³ Also single fruit trees were declared as holy objects and thus confiscated for the benefit of the mosque or particular mullahs (Revomutk 20.06.2011; Madrushkat 05.07.2011).

Islamic institution, referring to an uncontested system of values and beliefs. However, at present times the procedure is commonly considered obsolete. One farmer in Revomutk village stated that in his village the practice of *kalidi Islom* was abandoned only after the local mullah, who was in favour of *kalidi Islom*, passed away (20.06.2011). Nevertheless, the practice of *kalidi Islom* enabled for a certain period binding decisions build on the shared narrative of universal validity of Islam.

Local Governance through Parallel Normative Systems

Against the fact that *bobogi* arrangements are bypassing the legal framework and state land reform regulations, it becomes apparent that in the Zarafshan Valley alternative normative systems are present, which guide local governance processes. *Bobogi* arrangements build on a mix of Islamic values, local traditions and moralities. Tentatively, there are three different normative systems in present Zarafshan Valley that have a stake in negotiating agricultural matters: Norms related to Islam, norms related to the state organizations and norms deriving from local values and moralities. Although the institution *bobogi* is contradicting the state land reform, these arrangements are *de facto* in place, providing an example for the parallel and overlapping presence of the different normative systems. The following sub-chapter provides examples of how different institutions, organizations and processes are put forward in the Zarafshan Valley to influence agricultural decisions. These insights show that different regulation processes are parallel in place and overlap, which refer to diverse normative systems, i.e. to the state, to Islam, local customs etc. This situation explains why various communal institutions, virtually the entire community, are involved to regulate and implement important agricultural decisions. Due to the intransparent distribution of power and

authority it is necessary to consider the various normative systems and related organizations, institutions and processes, also those not immediately linked to agriculture. Their decisions eventually determine about the implementation, i.e. distribution of resources. Subsequently, local farmers navigate the different forums, i.e. institutions, organizations and processes, however with different success.

Selective Presence of State Organizations in Local Agricultural Matters

It has been mentioned earlier in the chapters above that the state administration and its organizations are only partially present in rural affairs. That means that important disputes as access to natural resources, input and markets are purposefully left with the communities, thus they are not solved through state organizations and procedures, as it is suggested by the land reform legislation. The above presented case of *bobogi* arrangements confirms that the state authorities in the Zarafshan Valley are either not willing to interfere, or not considered adequate by the local community. State organizations rarely interfere in local agricultural matters. Everyday farming matters are addressed on local level and usually solved there. State authorities use various pre-texts¹³⁴ not to interfere in local affairs, referring to the lack of funds to travel to the countryside (*agroprom*) or insisting on local subsidiarity.¹³⁵ Authorities are often not interested in getting involved in local

¹³⁴ Often authorities refer to the lack of resources to travel or the respect of local institutions as *tinji* and *kishlokdori*.

¹³⁵ Farmers stated repeatedly that authorities avoid getting involved in certain types of local conflicts as related to access arrangements, ensuring civil rights or economic agreements. It depends on the power and networks of the single farm household to mobilize the administration to act.

conflicts¹³⁶ as this provides no benefits, just additional workload and trouble. The passive role of the district and sub-district administration became evident in the reluctant implementation of land reform, where the respective organizations “simply don’t care” (Madrushkat 12.06.2012). However, state authorities interfere selectively in rural matters. Sub-district authorities [*jamoat*] are active and visible in solving violent conflicts or implementing particular requests from the central government as eventually the establishment of individual *dehqon* farms. Though, there is very little predictability when and how the district level government [*hukumat*] in Ayni, Mehron or Panjakent actually will interfere in local agricultural affairs. Several powerful state institutions and organizations operate in rural areas that receive authority from straight links to the ‘power organs’ as military, police and the KGB.¹³⁷ Smallholder farmers often in vain seek to enrol state organizations in their concerns, while authorities act in favour of elites who can afford underhand payments or are linked through patronage networks. The following scheme of administrative structures and local insititutions recapitulates the various actors present in the Zarafshan Valley as described in chapter three. Figure 4 displays some key organizations and institutions from local level to municipal [*jamoat*], i.e. state administrative, level.

¹³⁶ As outlined above, in the case of civil law cases local institutions and organizations seek to keep the state administration out of rural affairs.

¹³⁷ The Tajik State Committee for National Security (GKNB), the successor agency of the Soviet KGB, is still commonly referred to simply as KGB.

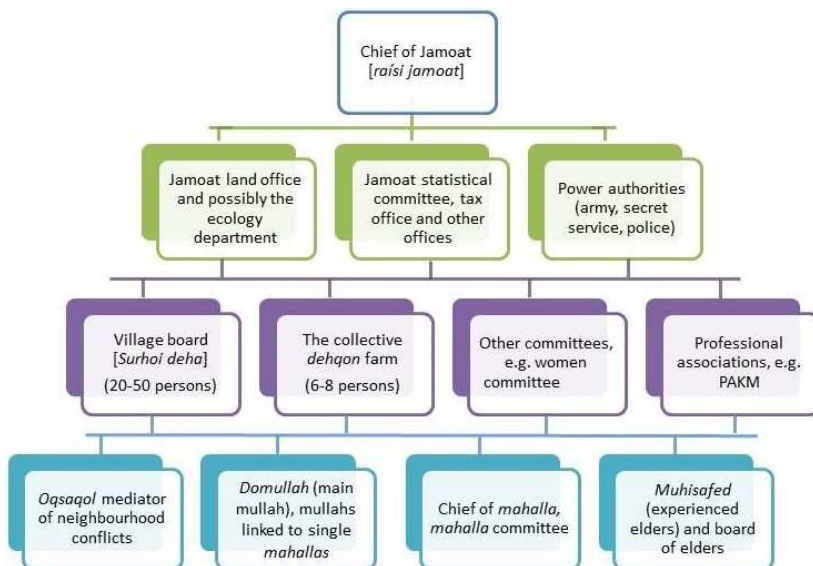


Figure 4 Scheme of administrative and local governance structures in the Zarafshan Valley. Source: The author.

Institutions and Processes

It appears that the bulk of agrarian affairs in the Zarafshan Valley is dealt with by local institutions such as the *raisi mahalla* [chief of the local neighbourhood association], the *shuroi deha* [village council], the *majlisi umumi* [grand community assembly], but also the *oqsaqol* [local facilitator and arbitrator of marriages, divorces, conflicts, etc.] and the board of elders. The board of elders is a widespread institution in the Zarafshan area, i.e. a gathering of elderly male persons in the local tea house, *klub*, or mosque to discuss and evaluate village actions and policies.¹³⁸ Although, the board of elders is not sanctioning body, however it can be an

¹³⁸ In some villages existed a kind of female pendant to the tea house called *komiteti sanho*. However, I rarely saw this in action. Institutions as the women committee, which at time of the field research still existed in many communities, appear to lose influence on general village affairs. Such changes result from an emerging Islamic lifestyle, which does not foresee a public role for women.

important voice as it presents local traditions and ethics which concerns also the decision making on agricultural matters, as displayed in the case of *bobogi* requests. Interestingly, the ordinary mullahs or the *domullah*, as the main mullah of the village, usually did not play a prominent role in everyday decision making.¹³⁹ Only in the case of the *kalidi Islom* procedure a straight link between decision making and Islam was acknowledged. Throughout the Zarafshan Valley religious authorities did not appear legitimized or interested in interfering in agricultural matters. References to Islamic values are consensus throughout the Zarafshan Valley. With regard to southern Tajikistan, Boboyorov confirms:

“[T]raditional authorities, such as elders and religious notables [...] enforce indigenous institutional arrangements to regulate local political structures, control access to land and provide socio-political stability, and they also refer to indigenous sources of legitimacy which often contradict the principles set by formal sources such as laws” (Boboyorov 2013a: 40).

This finding applies to the Zarafshan area as well. Islamic values are very much present in everyday governance processes, to a degree that perceived illegitimate governance decisions and implementations are publicly contested as being “unfair” and “not according to Islam” (upper Zarafshan 20.06.2011). However, even though local mullahs or the *domullah* disagreed with communal affairs, particular processes and decisions, i.e. *bobogi* decisions, their statements did not cause a reconsideration of access arrangements. Thus, the legitimization through Islamic institutions on local level is an asset in governance processes; however it is no veto-argument. Conflicts over agricultural matters in Zarafshani

¹³⁹ Often, the heads of important families are involved in village affairs, as they present themselves as proper institution.

communities are handled by a variety of institutions. Issues over land and water, but also the cutting trees etc. among nearby households will certainly involve the *ra'isi mahalla* [chief of the local neighbourhood association] or the village *oqsaqol* respectively. However, especially economically relevant issues are not easily solved on this level. Usually, the inferior party will proceed to other structures that potentially provide governance. A central institution in the community is the grand community assembly, *majlisi umumi*, which takes place in each village one or two times a year. All inhabitants may request additional *majlisi* when necessary. Typically only male will attend and may speak up to request decisions to be made. Village elites, not necessarily play a prominent role at such assemblies. Rather, the *majlisi umumi* appears to be the place to publicly criticize elites and administration. In many cases the discussion of decisions taken ends in follow-up discussions at other forums, so that the implementation of decisions massive is postponed or completely neglected (Madrushkat 13.06.2012). Elite figures even publicly reject *majlisi* decisions or simply refuse implementation. Thus, in most communities visited in the Zarafshan Valley the *majlisi umumi* did not give the impression of providing powerful decisions and ensuring their implementation. However, in Madrushkat village for example, people agreed in an earlier *majlisi umumi* village assembly around 2005 not to accept *bobogi* requests anymore. People explicitly spoke out against the institution: “*Bobogi* is not according to law and not according to *shari'ah* [...] the majority of people will be harmed by *bobogi*, as it will only make a few people rich” (Madrushkat 05.07.2011). Effectively, only a few cases of *bobogi* distribution were mentioned in this village. Reportedly, requests for land restitution were denied with reference to the earlier community decision and distribution was then conducted according to the land reform legislation.

“Last year, 2010, a person from Kūhistoni Nav came to the village with a truck load of building material and occupied a piece of land that belonged to his grandfather. He unloaded everything there. The respective land plot is leasehold [arenda] of a local farmer. Consequently the sub-district [jamoat] organized a village meeting [majlisi umumi] where the majority of villagers approved that bobogi is not valid in this village” (Madrushkat 05.07.2011).

In this case, the respective farmer was able to mobilize public support and effectively enforced the ruling attitude on how to distribute natural resources. As a matter of fact, the public neglecting of *bobogi* arrangements resulted in less social tensions expressed in this community in comparison to other villages nearby.

Intersection: Darvonho, Guard of the Graveyard

One villager, Mirzadi*, denounced another villager, Darvonho, head of a rather poor household and guard of the village grave yard [*posboni kabriston*], to the district ecology department by writing a complaint letter [*ariza*]. In that, Darvonho is accused to cut some dead, dried up trees that were on the land of the graveyard. Since the local pump station burned, the area of the graveyard is not irrigated anymore, so the trees had been dried up several years ago. Darvonho admits to have cut the trees, although this happened in accordance with the community which he had addressed before whether to chop the trees or not. After chopping the trees, the wood was distributed among villagers. However, the letter writer wrote about it to the ecology department and consequently the guard was fined to pay the enormous sum of 43'000 *Somoni* [ca. 6718 €]. Since it was impossible for Darvonho to pay this amount of money, he faced either to go to jail or to sell the house. In order to defend the position of the guard the villagers requested an extraordinary village assembly [*majlisi umumi*] to discuss the case. At the meeting, one representative from the ecology department, the chief of the *jamoat* and representatives of community committees sat on the plenum. Everybody knew who wrote the letter, however the person himself, Mirzadi, didn't show up. Mirzadi is a powerful elite figure in the village with excellent contacts to the district government *hukumat*. The *majlisi umumi* declined the letter of Mirzadi and he was requested to withdraw the letter. Eventually it was decided that the guard shall not pay the sum. A few days later I learned that Mirzadi declined to withdraw the letter and that the further decision is somewhere stalled at another committee in the *hukumat* [district government]. Events were unfolding rapidly and it was not really clear what is the state of affairs. It turned out that the fine to the guard was significantly reduced: "The case is now at another committee, nobody knows what happens next. Maybe he has to pay less. It was first stated that he had cut 64 trees, but it is

now only four” (28.04.2012). So, the issue is likely to be solved with a significantly reduced payment to the ecology department and a communal collection of money to support Darvonho with the due payment (Garibak 26.04.2012, 28.04.2012).

* Names have been changed

The Village Council Shuroi Deha

The example of the Darvonho case illustrates that the *majlisi umumi* has restricted means to solve conflicts timely and completely. At least, the *majlisi* reshapes the issue, bringing it potentially closer to a solution. Thus, the conflict moves in a modified form on to other governance structures. As mentioned earlier above, since circa 2011 the village council *shuroi deha* has been introduced in the lower Zarafshan Valley on request of the district government. Due to the backing of the district and sub-district administration, the *shuroi deha* is understood to concentrate local affairs and substitute other local institutions. However, the *shuroi deha* is no direct government organization as its members and its chief are locally elected. The institution is widely diffused in Zarafshani communities. In some communities it substitutes the previous existing *committeti kishlok* and runs commonly under this name (Madrushkat 15.06.2012). In practice however, the *shuroi deha* appears an elite committee, formed of the important figures of the community. It consists predominantly of male, between 45 and 60 years. In Garibak village, the acting chair of the *shuroi deha* explains that the village council exists on suggestion of the *raísi jamoat* [sub-district chief] since 2011. It exists supposedly in every village, because “it is ‘by law’. The *hukumat* supports it. The *raísi jamoat* came and invited the most active people of the village and advised them to form this

committee" (04.05.2012). During the inaugural meeting the chair of the village council [*raísi shuroi deha*] was elected by acclamation, he then invited successively around 30 people to participate in the council (Garibak 04.05.2012).¹⁴⁰ The significance of the village council is commonly accepted: "The most important committee is the *shuroi deha*. It had earlier fifteen members, now between thirty and thirty-two. Also women and the different *mahallas* [*domkom*] are represented" (Garibak 07.05.2012). Regular meetings take place once a month, all members have to attend and "only proper excuses are accepted" (Garibak 04.05.2012). Nevertheless, the structure of the organization may vary throughout the Zarafshan Valley; there seems no fixed number of board members. In Madrushkat village one member of the *shuroi deha* stated: "There are eight persons, including two women. We meet about one time per month" (15.06.2012). Also in this village, important figures of village affairs were requested by the municipality [*jamoat*] to enter the *shuroi deha*. This precondition helped to enhance the significance of the institution. The chair of Garibak's village council explains:

"People go to their neighbourhood association [mahalla] with written complains [ariza] or suggestions and request for some action, for instance the channel cleaning procedure is too slow because nobody shows up at hashar [voluntary

¹⁴⁰ In the village Garibak, it was made clear that this new organization shall summarize the existing governance structures in the community. The chiefs of the 8 local *mahallas* [in this village called *domkom*] and the chief of *mahalla* committee, total 9 persons, were requested to take part in the new village council. Similarly the chief of the still existent collective *dehqon* farm, the sub-district chief [*raísi jamoat*], the *post-telegrafčik* [local communications officer], the chief of the communal forest or rangeland administration [*raísi leskhoz*], the director of the school, one representative of the local police [*miliz*] and, as the chair of the committee continuous "other active people, as well as 5 to 6 women which I cannot remember who exactly, and people that have good knowledge of their field or in general" (Garibak 04.05.2012). Thus, active people are considered those with a function or some public role.

neighbourhood work]. Such kinds of messages are processed to me and I negotiate a solution” (Garibak 04.05.2012).

Ideally, the chair of the village council negotiates with the support of other council members practical issues of everyday community life such as infrastructure maintenance, implementation of orders from the district authorities¹⁴¹ but also cases of violence and difficult requests of divorce. In contrast to the *mahalla* [local neighbourhood association] the village council deals with issues that potentially concern the entire community. While the *mahalla* negotiates tasks and problems among immediate neighbours within village quarters, the *shuroi deha* is addressed if a solution cannot be found on this level. Among the issues that are being dealt with are also conflicts resulting from the negotiation of access to land. Complaints are also referring to the incorrect distribution of land during previous land reforms or unjustified *bobogi* requests. Such complicated issues tend not being solved in this framework. Also the *shuroi deha* is not able to solve the Darvonho case. For land related conflicts lacks both, the basis for decision making, i.e. following state laws or local rules. Further, the institution lacks the necessary authority to implement eventual decisions. Thus, the *shuroi deha* carefully limits itself by protracting or avoiding certain cases. Respectively, it could not be identified which village institution actually had taken the decision of the *bobogi* restitution to the above mentioned Russian teacher. It appears that the issue of authority is yet to clear within the village council. While in some villages the *shuroi deha* seemed to work efficiently thanks to the chief’s individual authority. In other villages it did not became clear how the council generate authority within the community but also

¹⁴¹ Tasks of the *shuroi deha* may be to take measures against a rabies epidemic in the village or collecting money from villagers for joint projects and investments, e.g. the provision of electricity or the repair of a burned pump station (Madrushkat 12.06.2012; Garibak 15.05.2012).

towards the own members and villagers. The means of the chair of the village council to exercise power in order to implement democratic decisions are not specified. The facilitation of decisions and their implementation, thus real governance results, significantly depends on the capacities of the chair of the organization. Consequently, I later learnt that the chair of the *shuroi deha* had just stepped back from his post on disputes regarding the access to land and water, complaining that “nobody is listening to me” (Garibak 08.06.2012).



Photograph 11 Asleddin, the former chief of the village committee.

Source: The author.

Local Governance and Shift of Authority

Competences and actions of local institutions and organizations overlap; however they are often not able to provide coherent decisions and implementation of decisions. Case-wise, decisions are being made or protracted; processes that lead to decisions are not transparent. Posing a request to district or local organizations is an unpredictable endeavour as availability and assertiveness of boards, institutions or processes are intransparent. The actual constitution

of institutions and organizations; persons present and their capacity to ensure the implementation of decisions are neither fixed nor transparent. In consequence, one and the same request for access to land may turn out completely different. Accordingly, it did not become clear in which institution the actual decision regarding the restitution of *bobogi* in the case of the Russian teacher has been taken. In the respective village, the chief of the collective *dehqon* farm was rich and considered very powerful. Assumingly, he approved the access arrangements made for the Russian teacher. Taking the position of the chief [*ra'is*] of the local collective agricultural enterprise as example, the position has been usually very important in rural communities, in fact it served as post-Soviet equivalent to the former *kolkhoz* chief. The position enables operational powers over resources, long-term influence on village development and establishes contacts to state structures and other relevant people. Often the chief of the *dehqon* farm appears as mayor of the community, thus contact person for village outsiders, which is an ideal condition for own business activities. However, in recent years the post lost attractiveness as it provides only minimal direct material benefits. It depends massively on the material background and individual reputation to be considered a leader in community. One farmer explained bluntly why he refuses to become chief of the collective *dehqon* farm: „Without money your speech is of no value“ (upper Zarafshan 15.06.2011). The straight relation between wealth and reputation was underlined several times in various circumstances. Farmers explained they were not wealthy enough to establish good relations with the *hukumat* and *jamoat*. Personal authority and reputation derives from family background, individual character and the capacity to mobilize resources. Higher ranking authorities possess plenty of means to hinder the action and initiatives in the village. It is expected that for

any agreement with higher authorities financial contributions fall due. Consequently the *raís* will need to invest private money to get things done at higher levels while otherwise villagers will reject the weak *raís* (upper Zarafshan 15.06.2011). Thus, suitable and popular candidates, but without sufficient financial resources will usually not apply for such posts (Bliss 2011: 47). The capacities of the *raís* are considered through his performance at village meetings, his mode of keeping promises and managing the remaining assets of the collective *dehqon* farm. A village chief is expected to present political projects and realized them at least partially. During field research I came twice across chiefs of collective *dehqon* farms who were apparently not as powerful and assertive as it has been the case in other villages. Given the described challenges, the position as chief of the *dehqon* farm was in some villages not considered attractive and powerful local elite figures deliberately abstained from the position. Thus, with respect to access negotiations the local governance situation is in fact confuse in the Zarafshan Valley. Field research shows that there are communities where strong elites maintain formally collective structures. However, field research provided also several examples where persons resigned from positions as chiefs of *dehqon* farms and village committees as these were deprived of authority (upper Zarafshan 19.06.2011). One former chief of the *committeti kishlok* justified his resignation from the post soberly: “Nobody listened to my words” (lower Zarafshan 28.04.2012).

Summary: Access Arrangements as Meshwork Governance

Summarizing the above, in the Zarafshan Valley there is not one dominant authority in agricultural matters. Instead, taking the example of agricultural access negotiations shows the assemblage

of diverse arrangements, referring to different normative systems. Consequently, access arrangements are potentially unreliable, in the Zarafshan Valley land is still redistributed through intransparent conditions. Zarafshani' access arrangements refer to three different normative systems: Norms related to Islam, norms related to the state and its organizations and norms deriving from local values and moralities. Normative systems correspond with institutions, organizations and processes that negotiate local affairs. Nomination and constellation of the respective institutions, organizations developed differently throughout the single Zarafshani communities. Power and assertiveness of institutions, processes and institutions differ significantly even in nearby communities. Steering of land access negotiations is done by the central and powerful institutions of the community; however these differ throughout the various Zarafshani communities. Similar requests and disputes are differently negotiated, what renders predictability and security for local farmers more difficult. Effectively, different norms, i.e. from Soviet values to Islamic rules, determine the local social order and everyday practices in the Zarafshan Valley. Thus, institutions, organizations and processes that structure everyday affairs refer to a set of normative systems that are mutually exclusive, overlap and cooperate.

Bobogi as Strong Institution

We have seen that *bobogi* arrangements link neatly with local moralities in the Zarafshan Valley. This means at first, underlining family values and respect to the ancestors. *Bobogi* refers to local traditions through narratives of how the arable land was created. Further, it links diffusely to Islam by recognizing the rules of the elders etc. Therefore, *bobogi* requests implicitly capitalize on moralities and Islamic rules altogether, despite these references might also be rigged. However, *bobogi* and decisions are strong and

widely implemented in the Zarafshan area. The outreach of *bobogi* arrangements to different normative systems is considered an asset in governance processes. Other organizations, institutions and processes fail to determine access to land. Screening local negotiation processes shows that there are various norms that potentially offer governance in the Zarafshan Valley.

People may refer to Islam, as through *amri mar'uf*, *bobogi*, *kalidi islam*. Such references may be considered, however religious personnel as the mullah or *domulloh* hardly ever interfere in such negotiations. Governance requests based on religious practices as *kalidi Islom* may draw legitimacy from being close to Islamic values; however, these practices were only accepted for a very short period. Field works showed that land negotiations hardly ever can be solved on the local level; instead require at least the attention of strong local institutions. Local institutions such as the *mahalla* or the *shuroi deha* do not possess the political clout to settle durable access arrangements. The *mahalla* and other local institutions may decide for or against access negotiations, however lack the power instruments to implement these decisions. Ruling access negotiations through the state land laws is possible, but is neglected with the reply that all land has been distributed already. Although the state as normative system rules through selective presence and ambiguity, access arrangements are fairly improbable. Thus, there are different normative systems parallel present in the Zarafshan Valley. They potentially overlap and enhance or block each other. With regard to the request for land, related organizations, processes and institutions work with different success and often fail. In order to solve land shortage, Zarafshani' farmers rely on various strategies; whereas the selection of the institution *bobogi* has turned comparably stable.

Meshwork Governance

Against the complexity of normative systems on local level, the chapter concludes that access negotiations eventually finish as meshwork governance arrangements between the different claims and references to diverging norms. The assemblage of relevant institutions, hierarchies and processes entails that these, potentially bloc or compete with each other. With regard to the negotiations of access to arable land, changes are apparent in the Zarafshan area as the original assertiveness of formerly strong institutions and organizations has certainly decreased. Examples for this process may be *kalidi Islom* and *bobogi*, but also the state land legislation. The view on land negotiation processes in the Zarafshan Valley shows competition, overlapping, collaboration and bricolage of different institutions and organizations, the active protracting of processes or their complete avoidance. Zarafshani access negotiations have thus hybrid character. This situation is best conceptualized as meshwork governance, with a diffuse notion of authority in the sense that authority is not a monopoly of the State, but shared amongst “competing organizations, including corporate actors and public institutions both local and distant” (Manuel-Navarrete et al. 2009: 3). Sharing and fluctuation of power and authority is characteristic for meshwork governance processes, which builds on and integrates different normative systems. The plurality of norms and processes allows farmers to seek power and support at different governance forums and networks, what means in the framework of the Zarafshan Valley to manoeuvre parallel and overlapping normative systems.

8 *Ariza Letters to Manoeuvre Meshwork Governance*

Agricultural matters are steered, justified and determined in the Zarafshan Valley along different but overlapping normative systems. Governance, as decision making and implementation of decisions, evolves as meshwork arrangements of the diverse normative systems. This chapter focuses on *ariza* letters that depict a knowledge practice to interfere in governance processes with wide ranging influence on agriculture and rural livelihoods. *Ariza* letters are written complaints or requests that circulate frequently between local communities and district authorities in order to intervene in everyday affairs. I argue that in the present situation of parallel and overlapping normative systems, farmers employ knowledge practices, as compiling *ariza* letters, to obtain favourable results in local governance processes. *Ariza* letters refer to the normative system of the state in order to limit the uncertainty stemming from meshwork governance. Farmers' frequent use of *ariza* indicates underlying incentives to engage in letter writing for individual benefits. The chapter starts with a description of what *ariza* are and how these letters emerge. Unlike *bobogi* claims that emerged as knowledge practices that focus on Islam and local values, *ariza* letters build on the normative system of the state. Letters are submitted to any kind of authority with different impact. With particular regard to the agricultural sector, I take a twofold perspective on *ariza* letters that underlines first, individual or collective efforts to intervene in rural processes by focussing on concrete claims and requests. Farmers use letters to address numerous state authorities also with identic issues or requests. This mode of forum shopping reaches in the case of the Zarafshan Valley from sub-district level up to the presidential office. However,

farmers benefit from letters with mixed success, i.e. authorities protract, refuse to act or even punish the letter writer. The second part of the chapter looks into *ariza* letters as means of political steering of the community, where the actual concern of the letter is secondary to the demonstration of power. The chapter provides evidence how *ariza* letter interfere in agricultural concerns, designed to address authorities and govern rural communities. This type of *ariza* letters affirmatively appeals to the normative system of the state, i.e. referring to dominant state narratives or hegemonic perspectives, and serves authorities as pretext for interventions. Identifying such narratives and perspectives within an apolitical post-Soviet public sphere and in context of incomplete information of the limited access order (LAO) is actually not easy. So called *arizaboz*, skilled and knowledgeable local writers, frequently produce letters upon which authorities are ready to intervene in rural communities. Complaint letters, in this case, serve the state and authorities to exercise power and control in rural areas. Frequent letter writers, so called *arizaboz*, effectively survey the rural community and report any state critical or independent behaviour. Thus, in the Zarafshan Valley *ariza* letters are knowledge practices used to exercise power. Farmers make frequent use of *ariza* in order to link local issues to the normative system of the state. Issuing *ariza* is a knowledge practice, not only to write the letter, but also to facilitate the right recipient, timing and selection of the appropriate forum. In particular *arizaboz*, as so called professional writers, dispose of suitable networks to enforce their writing.

Ariza Interventions in Agricultural Processes

Ariza is the Tajik term for written complaints or requests that are submitted to all kinds of authorities, from local institutions up to

national organizations and the president of the country. *Ariza* letters may be a suggestion, denunciation or a report, filed to complain about issues of daily life. Such letters are a means used by villagers to request third party interference in local affairs. On contrary to *bobogi*, rural complaint letters are sent mainly to the various branches of the district governance *hukumat*, however also to other authorities and administrative bodies on all levels of the Tajik state. Usually *ariza* seek to involve powerful actors as e.g. the respective district or provincial agricultural or corruption departments that are powerful to intervene in rural conflicts. Letter writing to authorities has a long history in the Soviet Union and in Soviet Central Asia and were part of everyday life and the public sphere (Fitzpatrick 1996; White 1983). Within the Soviet mind set of criticizing publicly individual and collective shortcomings in order to improve the society as such, letter writing was encouraged and widespread until the end of the political union. Remnants of this perception and attitude have prevailed in present day Tajikistan and letters are noted in the Tajik legislation(Одинаев et al. 2007).¹⁴² However, in everyday life there is a very little margin for voicing critical opinions. As indicated in chapter two with regard to the challenges to data collection, state and society are not disposed to non-authoritative or critical contributions (Boboyorov 2013a: 42). The public sphere is at present severely limited, dominated by state ideology and related narratives so that people voice opinions, if ever, in the informal public. *Ariza* letters are at the intersection of

¹⁴² *Ariza* letters fulfil a particular role in Tajik conflict management and jurisdiction. Letter writing to authorities is a granted right of Tajik citizens. The quoted volume of Одинаев et al. sums up how to formulate *ariza* letters and where to send them (2007). Farmers are advised to write firstly to *jamoat* offices. If the subject matter concerns legal issues than letters shall be addressed to the court at *nohiya* level [district]. After that parties may address the provincial level [ҷумҳурий]. If there is no solution found, only then letter writers may call upon the president.

the informal public and the state. It is impossible to give an account of how many letters are written and what are actual results, however I consider the role of *ariza* very relevant in present rural affairs. Farmers in the Zarafshan Valley were frequently referring in one or another way to *ariza* letters. In many instances *ariza* letters relate to issues that derive from access arrangements to arable land and water. Authorities declared the distribution of land in course of the land reform finished; meanwhile numerous cases of contested access arrangements are left pending. In order to influence authorities on access decisions, small and medium households do not have many options at hand. Requests are formulated as *ariza* and addressed to institutions and authorities beyond sub-district level. This indicates the confrontational nature of *ariza* letters. Effective letters lead to governance decisions in favour of the letter writer. In order to be considered, letters does not need to be signed, authorities act also upon anonymous letters. This way, *ariza* letters are *de facto* an omnipresent phenomenon in Zarafshani villages, however, as the following examples will show, with incalculable outcomes.

Intersection: Public Request to Remove the Army Camp

Walking through the village around midday, I am meeting by chance an acquainted farmer on the street and we talk a bit. There are unusually many people on the streets today. I learn that they are heading to a meeting with the district governor [*hokim*] to discuss the presence of the army camp in this village. The district *hokim* and his entourage came to the village – making a long one and a half hour drive from the district centre [*rayon*]. I did not see him yet, but people assure me that he is in the village. We proceed to the meeting place, maybe 50 men came together so far, only a very few women. My farmer friend comments: “This is not enough, they wanted to mobilize 300”. He mentions that actually women are not allowed to come. We are talking in the midst of the crowd; still the *maclis* [meeting] is not starting. Suddenly my acquaintance doesn’t want to stay any longer, although the *hokim* didn’t show up yet. I remember from earlier talks with this farmer that he is already under pressure by the authorities. We leave and he tells me that the KGB and other power organs [Russian, *organy vlast*, i.e. the police, the army, the secret service, the corruption department; A.M.] interrogated him three times while he was on duty overnight in another village nearby. They cornered him and wanted to find out who is taking the lead “in this *ariza* writing” that led to the meeting today. He says that some 15 to 20 people from this village wrote anonymous *ariza* letters to various branches of the *hukumat* asking to remove the army camp and to distribute the affiliated eight hectare land. When I get back to my house, I meet other people from nearby villages. They also know about the meeting and I ask why they do not attend the event. They respond that they would like to but cannot – it is forbidden for them. The district government *hukumat* and the KGB do not allow it. Why is this so? They insist that strangers cannot attend such events and it is everywhere in the Zarafshan like this. One of my local acquaintances states that he wants to join the meeting only in the afternoon at 2 p.m., which

appears strange to me as the start was scheduled for before midday. The other people around are from different villages however they know about the letter writing and say that the power organs will soon find out about the writers, because they have informers everywhere.



Photograph 12 *Majlisi* [village assembly] in the lower Zarafshan area. Source: The author.

Around 3 p.m. apparently the meeting is finished, but results are not yet clear. Nobody is willing to talk about it. I stop asking about it as I run the risk of being considered a spy. Later the day I ask the young guard of our house: “There are no results of the meeting. They will not remove the army camp”. It seems that this is all that I can learn about it at this moment. The day after I am asking all farmers I meet about the outcome of the meeting. Yes, the district chief [*hokim*] came, but he declared that it is not possible to remove the army camp, because there are no other spaces available elsewhere in the valley. When I ask why villagers are interested in having the army camp removed, various plausible and unlikely arguments are brought forward. The supporters of the removal state that the local hospital nearby is disturbed, because it is partially occupied by the army and allegedly sick people complain about the noise. Somewhat less openly social conflicts [alcohol and drug abuse, violence, harassment of women] are mentioned, which the army camp would have brought into the village. No one mentions that there is also

the keen interest in the eight hectares of arable land held by the army camp. A couple of days later I meet again my acquaintance farmer and ask him if he has been later at the meeting with the *hokim*. “No and I don’t know what happened later on”. This sounds odd to me. He says the people that wrote the *ariza* letters simply want to distribute the arable land among them. “However the KGB will boil them down. They [the KGB] are present in each village.” He just doesn’t want to get into this story and therefore left the meeting before it started (upper Zarafshan 23.05.2012).

Risks and Repercussions of Letter Writing: Spoiling Village Tinji

The example of the debate regarding the army camp shows the urgency of farmers request for land and how sending *ariza* letters may cause diametric effects. Entanglement with state structures is not without risks. Despite its selective presence, the district administration dedicates attention and power resources to suspend the request to move the army camp. Engaging in *ariza* writing contains the concrete risk that the attention of authorities turns to the sender of the letter. Thus, farmer’s opinions are divided regarding the use or uselessness of letters to solve problems. It is common to acknowledge that *ariza* writing is “useless” (Soosun 23.06.2011) and “creates only problems, because it brings confusion into the village” (Revomutk 28.06.2012), the majority of informants acknowledge the occasional engagement in letters writing. However, asking farmers straight forwardly why they do not write a letter to point particular problems to the authorities, their response is almost always negative and defensive. Many farmers acknowledge that they wrote letters earlier, however wouldn’t do it today. People are open about the fact that they submitted a letter

long time ago, but less easy in admitting to do so today. Later observations indicate that usually letter writing is happening in secret and – unless it is a form of blackmailing – not communicated to those denounced in the letter. Local perceptions of orderly behaviour were described as based in values and moralities, which refer in the Zarafshan Valley and elsewhere to concrete conceptions such as *tinji*, literally wellness, happiness or peacefulness or *kishlokdori* an understanding of village dignity and sense of community (Boboyorov 2013a). A typical first statement when visiting a village would be that “in this village, every family has land” (upper Zarafshan 15.06.2011, 18.06.2011). Nevertheless, after spending some time in the community, it turns out that there are numerous poor and very poor households.¹⁴³ The motivation for such statements would be to respect village dignity [*kishloqdori*], underscoring the cohesiveness and peace [*tinj*] in the community. Writing letters conflicts with these conceptions. It is common opinion that *ariza* writing will jeopardize village *tinji* [village peace, harmony] and spoil the reputation of those who write. Prevalent opinion in the villages was that problems and conflicts among villagers shall be dealt within the own community (Garibak 23.04.2012, Madrushkat 13.06.2012). The risk to appear spoiling the village *tinji* due to addressing publicly conflicts in complaint letters may cause further problems for the respective households, e.g. isolate them in everyday life and within the village community. In the Zarafshan Valley, famers refer to *tinji* to describe the community as solidarity group which is, at best, only partially the case. Such

¹⁴³ It became clear very soon that this description was a friendly euphemism. During a walk through the respective community, I came across several poor households. Talking with a group of women in front of their households, one shouted: “This is how we live. You need to talk to women if you want to know how we live. There are some rich men down there [living in the lower, i.e. better parts of the village, A.M.] who say we all live well” (upper Zarafshan 03.07.2011).

constructions are also a reason for why farmers and local institutions are reluctant to involve community outsiders beyond the sub-district level [*jamoat*] in conflict-settlement procedures (Boboyorov, 2013: 89, 152f).¹⁴⁴ Only in rare occasions local requests for interventions are considered at district level and beyond. Letter writing usually does not lead to material benefits; however it easily harms relations with fellow-villagers. The normative conception of *tinji* is employed by elites to limit the room for manoeuvre of competitors, i.e. smallholder farmer, and thwart their request for external intervention in local matters. Letter writing contains the concrete risk of negative repercussions not only from fellow villagers. Authorities may ignore the intervention or give right away a negative response. Not seldomly, *ariza* provoke a furious response from lower tier authorities, who are themselves integral components of the local elite system. Land conflicts, as mentioned earlier, are particularly sensible cases. As a result, reportedly the responses to *ariza* letters go as far as threats of physical violence by authorities and police. One medium aged poor farmer plausibly explained that it is useless to write and even counterproductive as: “The police will come and punish you” (upper Zarafshan 17.06.2011).¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, complaint letters serve the district administration to exercise power over rural areas. There appear to exist underlying obligations between authorities and selected local *ariza* writers, where certain letters are taken as pretext of the state

¹⁴⁴ As outlined above already, communities virtually seek to avoid the application of the official legal framework in their locality and solve conflicts locally (Boboyorov 2013; Heathershaw 2009). It is a question of *kishlokdori* village dignity and sense of community belonging that local communities deal with conflicts independently, avoiding outside interference. This attitude corresponds, as mentioned earlier above, with the reluctance of authorities and state representatives to interfere in local affairs, unless there are financial incentives to interfere.

¹⁴⁵ The same farmer stated that the police once approached him with letter he wrote, then tore it into pieces and threatened to beat him up.

to exercise power over the rural population. Interfering state authorities, as the *hukumat's* ecology or corruption departments, act in favour of one or another interpretation or narrative, which thus becomes effectively the hegemonic perspective while overriding alternative narratives and regulations. I will come back to this point further below.

Conflicts Relate to the Access to Land

The account of the army camp reiterated the general finding that the shortage and unequal distribution of arable land is the primary source of tensions in the rural society in the Zarafshan area. In almost every community visited, there were pending requests to the district or sub-district land committees or to the chief of the local collective *dehqon* farm to renegotiate access to land and water. Namely marginal households requested a general review of access arrangements by higher-ranking government authorities. As this rather unrealistic scenario is unlikely to happen; most farmers concentrate on individual arrangements. This meant in many cases to request firstly *bobogi* land and if this fails to issue an *ariza* letter claiming for land according to the land reform. One farmer managed through stoic repeated requests to eventually receive 40 *sotiq* of arable land. Allegedly, he wrote eight letters to various committees of the sub-district government [*jamoat*](Soosun 23.06.2011). The former chief of the *jamoat* describes the success of this request as a rare exception. According to him the requests for land plots are useless [*be foida*], because there is no arable land in the communities available anymore. None of the village households would give land away, neither would at the time still existing collective *dehqon* farm do. The former chief of the *jamoat* continuous: "If people request land from the administration, the

answer is: Please go to Zafarobod” (Soosun 23.06.2011).¹⁴⁶ In fact, usual appeals for access or re-distribution of land through *ariza* letters are not successful. A smallholder farmer from the upper Zarafshan area explained how his repeated requests for additional land to the chief of the *jamoat*, the court [*prokurator*] and to the *jamoat* land committee repeatedly failed. Referring to the quota of land for his household according to the land reform, he did not receive any additional land: “Nobody helped; they will give land only to their relatives” (upper Zarafshan 29.06.2011). The farmer admits that requesting land in the village is a very sensitive issue as it would mean to reschedule significant parts of present property structures. “Addressing the land committee means war [within the community, A.M.]” (upper Zarafshan 29.06.2011), because the authorities do not take any decision and avoid responsibilities. Instead the conflict remains in the village and occasionally turns also violent as the shootout between two families in a nearby village proofs.¹⁴⁷ In his village, the involved parties cannot agree on a common institutional framework, e.g. following the rationale of *bobogi*, state land reform legislation or an *ad hoc* ruling from the district government that would settle the request. According to the above farmer, only if the district *hukumat* redistributes the land, the distribution will be accepted by the community and thus implemented without turmoil: “The government must distribute [the land]. If I write a letter [*ariza*] and the land is distributed due to my letter, then people will come to me and ask: Are you the son of my father or why do you take my land” (upper Zarafshan 29.06.2011)? However, while the narrative of this farmer is obviously not shared by important parts of the village community, he seeks to enrol the district government in his project, which however shows little intention to interfere in local

¹⁴⁶ Zafarobod is a district in the northern low lands of Mastchohi Nav in Sughd district where arable land is allegedly available, but apparently no water.

¹⁴⁷ See footnote 51 above.

arrangements. Approaching authorities directly without facilitation is prone to failure, nevertheless there is a small chance of favourable outcomes for which farmers engage and try.

Forum Shopping with Ariza Letters

Due to their role in Soviet everyday life and embeddedness in the Tajik legal framework, *ariza* letters are part of the normative system of the Tajik state. That means, letters refer to the realm of state forums, i.e. organizations and processes, from which they claim actions or which are advised to act. Accordingly, many different types of letters as complaints, reports, denunciations, whistle blowing are sent to the forums available. Accordingly, farmers travel with their requests to various forums on different levels, i.e. from sub-district up to the national levels. This kind of forum shopping is practiced extensively throughout the Zarafshan Valley, e.g. to maintain or achieve additional access to arable land, but also to limit the activities of agricultural competitors. As we have seen in previous cases, it is common to approach various administrative forums to request for decisions to be taken or for being implemented. However, while only a few letters are considered, however writing contains the risk of conflict with local and sub-regional parties. Against this background, farmers repeatedly expressed the feeling of being subdued by local authorities and claimed that only external intervention from administrative levels above the local district would help to settle local conflicts. This means, the complaint letter is forwarded to the provincial government, sometimes even to the capital Dushanbe. Thus, district and local administration are potentially put in trouble by superior authorities. Often, such *ariza* letters are not submitted in secret, fellow villagers are informed and authorities are feeding this information back to lower tiers. Eventually, the state institutions in

charge will need to respond to the letter what potentially leads to pressure on local level – as indicated above already.

Addressing the President

The head of a very poor household, who had written to politicians on provincial and national level earlier to complain about the shortage of land, managed that a representative of the ruling people's party visited his house. However, following this meeting nothing happened; the farmer did not get any additional land or other benefits. Institutions in charge, especially the chief [*ra'is*] of the local collective *dehqon* farm, to whom the farmer had applied earlier several times, continued to decline his requests (upper Zarafshan 15.06.2011). Given the enormous imbalance of power between the poor farmer and the village elites on the other side, the next step of putting urgency in his struggle for land was, as he explained, to address the *ariza* letter straight to the president, Emomali Rahmon (upper Zarafshan 15.06.2011). Many smallholder or poor households consider this as legitimate step, because *jamoat*, *hukumat* are equally considered elite groups who work for their own interests and patronage networks.¹⁴⁸ In a move of almost nihilistic refusal, after other strategies to get access to arable land failed, some farmers linked up the symbolic rhetoric of the state government to root out corruption and nepotism and accordingly declared to write directly to the president (Revomutk 17.06.2011, Madrushkat 13.06.2012). To approach the president and central government authorities is encouraged by the national TV station

¹⁴⁸ There is the commonplace reference to the floors of the private houses of the authorities as metaphor for rampant corruption and extra-payments within the administrative system. "This is the third district governor [hokim] already. You cannot vote him away and it would also be no good to do so. The first governor built two houses with two floors. The second one did so. The third hokim has been newly appointed; he has just started the building site" (upper Zarafshan 15.06.2011).

that broadcasts reports of presidential crackdowns on corrupted state structures (Heathershaw 2009). It is encouraged, as I will outline further below, also by authorities on district level such as KGB and corruption department. Images of bulldozers destroying illegally build houses do not miss its impact on rural dwellers and mid-level authorities; meanwhile the president himself is displayed in the public sphere as the father of the nation that cares for the poor and smallholders also in remote areas (Soosun 23.06.2011).¹⁴⁹



Photograph 13 Ritualized Compliance: Gestures of modesty performed by elite farmers during a visit of the President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon. Source: Welthungerhilfe Tajikistan, Sadriddin Dshuraev.

Organizations as *hukumat* and *jamoat* and its respective departments have the reputation of not easily dealing with requests from smallholder farmers. Decisions are sometimes left pending for years. Pushing authorities to take action is not done by simply writing letters, it needs additional means to come to a decision. A poor farmer in an upper Zarafshani village explains that nothing can

¹⁴⁹ The president taking direct action on behalf of individual villagers is a topos of its own. References to the president are commonplace in the rural rhetoric, either in a form of neo-mystic apotheosis in the sense that the president is good and not knowing what is happening in the country because his staff is lying in his face. Media coverage of the president increasingly turns to the iconography of his divine-fateful role as “father of the nation” (Lemon 2015b, RFE/RL Tajik Service 2015).

be done about reluctant authorities. Due to his service for the Soviet army in Afghanistan he is entitled to a small pension as a veteran. He admits that finally, since a few years he receives half of the assigned pension, the other half is somewhere lost in the administration. He resigned to claim the other half of his pension, because “letter writing [to the district or sub-regional *hukumat* or *jamoat*] is useless, it leads to nowhere. To get my rights I would need to spend one month in Dushanbe to appeal to president directly” (upper Zarafshan 15.06.2011). Accordingly, in Dushanbe it would be necessary to get to know the right people and advance payments to get the request accepted and dealt with. Smallholder’s orientation towards the president is rational, as simply writing to authorities is hardly effective. The sender would need to sustain its letter with further networking, distributing gifts and favours or mobilizing power resources. Potentially, referring with the *ariza* letter to the omnipresent state propaganda may work well for letter writers as it put medium level authorities under pressure not to act against central policies. Hafiz Boboyorov (2013) describes the multi-layered processes of conflict solving in rural areas between the government, local authorities, processes and institutions as subsidiarity principle, the attempt to keep the matter at the lowest possible local level. He explains using the case of southern Tajikistan, how governance representatives such as e.g. the district *hokim* [governor] promise to solve problems, however then the issue is not raised publicly again for a long period of time. Such way of skipping appeals is a strategic manoeuvre used by government functionaries to allow local mediators to resolve the problem. As one informant asserted: “You write the complaint letter [*ariza*] and they do not respond to it until the second time you re-write and pass it personally on to the government official, if you have personal relations [*odam*]” (Boboyorov 2013a: 144). Smallholder farmers in

the Zarafshan Valley usually lack the time and funds to raise interest for their appeals at higher administrative levels. It is common knowledge that authorities only act upon extra payments. Many farmers were convinced that it is best to network with powerful persons who then eventually support their claim.

Exercising Power through the Ecology Department

One inevitable organization in rural communities especially in the lower Zarafshan area is the so called ecology [*ecologia*] department of the district administration government *hukumat*. In the lower Zarafshan area, the department is reportedly in charge since around 2010 (Garibak 28.04.2012). It maintains, among other things, the inventory of greens on the land plots. Cutting trees and shrubs, also in parts, is forbidden without the permission of the ecology department. Even though there is no cadastre of the existing trees, farmers insisted that the regulations of the ecology department include also dead trees (Garibak 26.04.2012, Soosun 11.06.2011). Thus, changing the present inventory of greens requires the formal consent from this department. Although the respective permission shall be available free of charge from authorities, usually extra payments are due. Namely smallholder farmer cannot afford these time consuming and costly procedures. Therefore, many farmers do not care and potentially do not even know about the regulations of the ecology department. Normally, the ecology department does not proactively control farmers' properties. It acts upon request, i.e. anonymous denunciation of third parties. Central areas of the Zarafshan Valley are particular suitable for fruit production, especially apricots. Considerable apricot plantations dominate the landscape. Apricots can provide good income, because they are sold either fresh or dried. Their kernels may be processed separately, so apricot production is potentially a lucrative business. Talking with an experienced apricot farmer, he reveals that he is not very happy

with the trees, because most of them are old and the tree species is from Panjakent; i.e. not exactly adaptable to the mountainous conditions of the upper Zarafshan. Since it is leasehold land [*arenda*], he may not cut trees or do pruning without the permission of the collective *dehqon* farm and the district ecology department. “If you do not cut old trees regularly, there will be no space and sun for the new trees to grow” so it is essential to take some trees out and do pruning. Thus, he cuts every year some trees, even though he has no permission to do so (Soosun 11.06.2011).¹⁵⁰ Another apricot farmer from the lower Zarafshan spoke outraged about the unfair situation for farmers being conditioned by the ecology department. He planted 20 new apricot trees at the place of the old ones. Although he insists that he didn’t cut them, just replaced, or as he preferred to say: “I did some pruning [*paivandci*]” (lower Zarafshan 08.05.2012). Although this statement was a mere euphemism for cutting trees, however in case of an investigation it may make the difference. When I ask if he needed a permission from the ecology department to do this work, he replied: “It is not fair that they request documents and fine people, because they don’t know how many trees there are.” He continued to complain: “They also didn’t help last year when the trees were in danger of drying out. When I created the garden from scratch [by levelling the terrain, providing top soil and irrigation, A.M.] no one helped and no one cared. The government did not blame the *vodkhoz* [the water office] or sub-district administration for not providing water”.¹⁵¹ In fact, fostering individual initiative is no concern of the authorities. Implicitly the farmer acknowledges the risk of being denounced for cutting a number of trees, because “the ecology

¹⁵⁰ The wood that the farmer is allowed to cut is ought to be returned to the collective *dehqon* farm.

¹⁵¹ Such investments cost the farmer, according to his own statements, two years of rice harvest and a cow to buy tubes and the water pump.

department comes only on request that means when someone calls or writes to them” (lower Zarafshan 08.05.2012). Administrative overregulation combined with unaccountability of state employees is not only a severe economic obstacle to individual farming. In fact, the ecology department appears useful for political, economic and ecologic purposes altogether, ready to exercise power on demand. By threatening basically every household with potential charges, it efficiently exercises power over a large number of farmers. For the authorities it presents further an easy means to siphon off revenues due to flexible rules and little accountability. The ecology department gets into action usually on external initiative, initiated by *ariza* letter denunciations (Garibak 28.04.2012). Writing to the ecology department is an easy means to put pressure on fellow villagers or competitors. Denunciations through *ariza* letters are conveyed to the respective administration, either the corruption department or the ecology department and are apparently accepted without questioning the motivation of the sender. “You can’t protect yourself from such letters. There are informants in every village” (Garibak 01.05.2012). Authorities’ willingness to accept letters corroborated many farmers prevailing perception that there are paid informants in each village that report to authorities. The situation differed slightly throughout the lower and upper parts of the Zarafshan Valley. While in the upper parts of the valley, the ecology department was hardly mentioned as an obstacle to farming. Communities situated closer to administrative centres appeared prone to denunciations, as easy means to exercise power over co-villagers, i.e. potential competitors.

Letter Writing as Political Steering

Other *ariza* letters point at the political dimensions of communal actions and processes. Such letters seek primarily to exemplary

exercise power in the rural community. The state as the main source of power in rural areas is affirmatively embraced and thus deliberately involved by this sort of *ariza*. This type of *ariza* letters also refers to concrete issues in rural communities; however link these with general norms promoted by state decrees and laws, hierarchies, historical narratives or language. This way, local agricultural affairs are transformed into affairs that concern the entire state. The actual issue of the letter appears not the central concern of the author of the letter, instead the possibility to demonstrate power. Such interventions refer to the specific post-Soviet political economy prevailing in Tajikistan which has characterized earlier above as limited access order (LAO). This implies a restricted public sphere, dysfunctional and co-opted democratic institutions and organizations. It appears that some complaint letters belong to neopatrimonial governance arrangements with the task to maintain also in rural area a selective system of control. In many villages professional writers, so called *arizaboz*, are active who regularly write to authorities. These skilful and knowledgeable writers are suspected to maintain underhand arrangements with district authorities. *Arizaboz* are knowledgeable and capable to select governance forums of the state normative system, create attention for their case and accordingly pressure villagers and lower tiers authorities alike. Such *ariza* letters are made either public or informally, and are not seldom simply denunciatory.

Professional Writers Arizaboz

Following up the life stories of some frequent letter writers it becomes apparent that writing is also practiced as a profession as

such.¹⁵² Persons, who are regularly writing to superior authorities, are called *arizaboz*. As explained earlier *ariza* writing is widely considered as “betraying village dignity” (Boboyorov 2013a: 140), nevertheless many letters are being circulated. Rural dwellers are convinced that there are *arizaboz* in their own village who regularly report observations to authorities, thus that the community is effectively surveyed. Regular writing on different issues labels its sender as plaintiff or *arizaboz* [literally, player with *ariza*]¹⁵³ and contains a bad reputation in the local society. Such a person “only strives for his personal profit and does not care about *qawmdori* [local village identity]” (Boboyorov 2013a: 141), neither about the harmonic living together [*tinji*]. Letter writing is thus considered “spoiling other people’s life” (lower Zarafshan 04.05.2012), especially when used to directly blackmail other people.¹⁵⁴ While discussing the use of *ariza* with farmers, this immediate financial aspect appeared maybe less central today. Rather, letter writing of *arizaboz* is closely related to the execution of power. During a talk with the head of the local village council [*shuroi deha*] about how competition and conflicts around natural resources are being solved

¹⁵² In fact, also in other communities people referred to prefabricated denunciations to authorities that are used to blackmail people (lower Zarafshan 06.06.2012). It is apparent that underhand dealings exist between authorities and selected writers. Allegedly officials request denouncing letters in order to have a reason to start investigations. In return, the letter writer benefits from the potential material extractions of the case.

¹⁵³ The appreciation of a person as *arizaboz* is negatively connoted, it refers to a person that frequently complains and thus spoils the community.

¹⁵⁴ Farmers see the motivation to write denunciatory letters in blackmailing money from others: “There are cases that people write about other villagers and inform governmental departments. Then they go to these persons telling them: I wrote about you, you are now in big trouble. Give me money and I will take back my letter” (lower Zarafshan 04.05.2012). In the early years after independence, groups of powerful were solving problems in the community on request for money with physical violence. “These people are fortunately gone now or in prison – thanks to governmental forces. But letter writing today is nearly the same; spoiling other people’s life” (lower Zarafshan 04.05.2012).

in his community, he receives a phone call that informs him about a new *ariza* letter to come from one notorious letter writer in the village (lower Zarafshan 04.05.2012). If he wants to know about this new letter, he should come now. So he goes off to learn about the letter. The head of the *surhoi deha* has no explanation of the writer's motivation: "I also don't understand him; he is present in all committees" (lower Zarafshan 04.05.2012). The letter writer is a pensioner of about 70 years, called Mirzadi¹⁵⁵, he is an exemplary case of an *arizaboz*. Earlier he has been working as a teacher; his father was an important communist "decorated with medals" (lower Zarafshan 02.08.2011). He is known to spend the whole day in the tea house [*choixona*] next to the main *basar* in the nearby city. People in the village and beyond have a bad opinion of him, because due to his writings to authorities he had created lots of difficulties to fellow villagers. This is not trivial, because beside of the concrete outcome of *ariza* requests, he demonstrated power through the capacity of mobilizing authorities. Getting the authorities to act upon a letter puts in evidence that the writer has backing from above [*pusht*]. Thus his words have value in the community, being able to design and dominate the governance process. It is commonly assumed that Mirzadi is a professional writer, i.e. being paid for writing letters to government departments. Several people stated that he is paid by various district offices, thus "sending an *ariza* letter is a feast for him" (lower Zarafshan 02.08.2011). His mastery in writing letters is the capacity to address different authorities in various administrations on district, provincial and national level and making the right argument. Mirzadi, however, maintained close relations to the Panjakent district government, allegedly especially the corruption agency, in the area widely known as the 6th *otel* [department]. The

¹⁵⁵ Original name has been changed.

'Agency against Corruption and Finance of the Republic Tajikistan'¹⁵⁶ is highly visible in the streets of Panjakent with billboards that encourage people to contribute information. Major parts of it consist of a picture of two hands exchanging dollar notes. Its background is widely decorated with Tajik bank notes.¹⁵⁷ Under the headline "Your fight against corruption is of help for the government and for any person" one finds email and telephone contacts of Panjakent and Khujand offices.



Photograph 14 Public relations of the Panjakent corruption department.

Source: The author.

However, this visual programme appears somehow as an invite to make underhand deals. Thus, the advert fits with the common saying that the corruption department works basically on its own agenda. "The corruption department is happy about such letters [*ariza*, A.M.], because it allows them to start investigating. They do not question or cross-check the letter writer" (Panjakent 02.08.2011). A critical examination of the sources of the *ariza* is not intended. Farmers assume that it does not even matter because "if

¹⁵⁶ The full denomination of this organization reads: *Agentii nazorati davlatii moliyavi va muboriza va korrupsiyai jumhurii Tojikiston. Rayosati agenty dar viloyati Sughd.*

¹⁵⁷ This refers to the local understanding of corruption, which is rather clear cut: "Corrupt is who takes money directly." (lower Zarafshan 07.08.2011).

they search, they will find something. The 6th *otel* people will earn on every letter. They will find something and then someone will pay to avoid trouble” (Panjakent 01.08.2012). Outcomes for those being addressed in such denunciations are almost always negative, i.e. as displayed in the case of Darvonho (see chapter seven) payments are due. Repealing to courts is highly unusual as it transponds the conflict on another level which may involve incalculable payments. Normally some agreement is found through local conflict solving mechanisms and institutions. However, ordinary people without the support of powerful networks face severe difficulties. People with money must pay to have the investigation stopped and poor people fall into dependency of powerful persons. This effectively means, the entire household is conditioned to the prevailing state doctrine, as represented by the local powerful actors. The aforementioned Mirzadi is potentially such a powerful actor, even though he does not assume a public role in the village. His knowledge of administrative and government structures and capacity to construct an argument allows him to put basically everybody in his community under pressure. He relates village decisions and villagers’ actions to state doctrines, laws and propaganda, knowing to whom to address the letters.¹⁵⁸ This is apparently effective to attract the support of the state. According to fellow villagers, the insistence on his particular perspective had helped Mirzadi to acquire a big share of a well irrigated garden plot with many fruit trees of about three hectare. Allegedly, according to the official documentation, he has less land; but his land plot is set together from various types of land. So, in practice it forms a single area,

¹⁵⁸ For those in the community with whom I talked about Mirzadi it seemed totally out of imagination to write a letter against this man to stop denunciations. The mismatch of knowledge, networks and capacities when struggling with him was considered so blatant that the adverse party has almost no means to respond, beside acts of violence. The below mentioned case of the school teachers served as warning example.

which is exceptional in the community. Originally, the collective *dehqon* farm, e.g. the successor of the *kolkhoz*, did not want to privatize the garden land as virtually everybody in the village wanted a share in this land. So the *dehqon* farm divided all other land, which Mirzadi did not want to take. At the same time, the collective *dehqon* farm had to pay taxes for the land, which it could not afford at that time. The writer, together with the family of the former *kolkhoz* gardener, sent several letters to the district government [*hukumat*] to claim the privatization of the garden. Villagers acknowledged that the two acted according to the law when insisting on this land (lower Zarafshan 23.05.2011), however the general opinion in the village was not to divide the garden. Mirzadis' request was turned down in the grand community assembly [*majlisi umumii*], nevertheless in disrespect of this decision he went on to put the collective *dehqon* farm under pressure with letters to district and national authorities insisting on land reform legislation. Against the persistent series of complaint letters, the local community had nothing more to put against the requests of Mirzadi and the gardener. Eventually, in 2005 or 2006, "in order to make them quiet the *dehqon* farm gave them the land", as one villager soberly put it (lower Zarafshan 01.06.2011). As a consequence to Mirzadi's aggressive writings, villagers try not to get involved with him, but not to offend him either. It is apparent that Mirzadi is able to mobilize power, by translating his knowledge from the village into arguments that attract authorities. His knowledge is a resource of power, applicable on any occasion, which ordinary villagers do not have available. Farmers fear him, avoid his presence where possible, however pay respect to him and attend the regular cycle of ceremonies in his household around *tui* [wedding], commemoration of the death or new-borns [*ma'raka*] and so on.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ It appears the term *ma'raka* is used in the Zarafshan Valley to describe a

Nevertheless, people strongly advised me not to seek to talk to him and warned me “not to go to bad people” (lower Zarafshan 01.05.2011).

Exercising Power through Hegemonic Narratives

Over the time that I visited the village, the list of letters sent by Mirzadi became longer and longer. I observed and heard of plenty *ariza* letters authored by him in the turn of roughly one year. One letter referred to alleged misdoings of the teachers of the village school.¹⁶⁰ Another letter, elaborated above, was addressed to the district ecology department. A series of letters criticized a project of an international NGO in the village, which he denounced for fraud to the district corruption department. Other letters indicated further alleged misdoings to the district corruption department, but also to those at provincial and national level. Earlier he denounced two households of co-villagers who he accused for running an illegal Islamic religious school [*madrassa*] in the village. This way, Mirzadi frames village actions and puts them in a perspective that forces authorities to interfere. Due to this capacity to create narratives that make authorities act, Mirzadi is considered powerful. As far as his letters and interventions match with the interests of the state, these narratives become thus the hegemonic perspective. Due to the selective presence of the state in rural areas, the position of state authorities towards particular issues of everyday agricultural

feast or gathering in the household with many guests and when *plov* [a regional rice dish] is served. Occasions for *ma'raka* are the commemoration of the death, a wedding, circumcisions and other occasions of the many related to the new born child (Stephan 2010: 199).

¹⁶⁰ A group of local school teachers once wrote about Mirzadi to the authorities: “First Mirzadi wrote a letter about something in the school. Then the teacher wrote about his misdoings and corruption. His unlawful acquisition of land, garden etc. However, the corruption department (6th *otel*) turned everything against the teachers. The teachers had to bring evidences and testimonies. Mirzadi wrote against them in return. In the end all teachers went to apologize to Mirzadi, so he draw the letter back” (lower Zarafshan 08.06.2012).

matters may not be clear. Mirzadis' letters tend to impose a hegemonic perspective on village matters by making explicit reference to state regulations, propaganda and ideology. It is this way that *ariza* letters coerce authorities, who are usually reluctant to intervene in rural affairs, to react accordingly. Through the focus on a particular perspective of everyday affairs, *ariza* letters may construct a dominant narrative while levelling out or even criminalize alternative meanings and arrangements. It is obvious that most claimants are not able to prepare their complaints accordingly, as for instance the example of the army camp outlined. The case of Mirzadi illustrates the highly political role that letter writing may entail. As long as one denies Mirzadi's particular function for the district administration, the motivation for denouncing the guard Darvonho and others to authorities remains unclear. Mirzadis' motivation does not lie in direct benefits, but it is his informal state function to maintain order in the community that provides him power. While state authorities demonstrated selective presence, he is effectively the permanent substitute of the state in rural areas. Thus, while Mirzadi does not enjoy a good reputation among co-villagers; people are afraid of him within the community and therefore powerful.

Summary: Ariza Letters as Knowledge Practice

The chapter illustrated the significant impact of *ariza* complaint letters on agricultural processes in the Zarafshan Valley, provoking interventions of state authorities regarding access to land, land use or the rule of law. Letter writing is a knowledge practice that attempts to interfere and manoeuvre governance processes, i.e. local meshwork arrangements. With regard to the agricultural production in the Zarafshan Valley *ariza* letters focus predominantly on three issues: to address authorities, to outcompete competitors

or to control and subdue rural communities. The practice of *ariza* letters must be seen in the context of the limited access orders imposed by the neopatrimonial authoritarian Tajik state. Writing to authorities was a widespread practice in the Soviet Union as a means to control the system from within. Parts of this Soviet practice have prevailed in Tajikistan today. As the Tajik legislation foresees, letters are addressed to district authorities, requesting them to act on the ground of the normative system of the state. Skilled writers manage to juxtapose with their *ariza* letter the normative system of the state against uncertain institutions and meshwork governance in the rural Zarafshan Valley. Still, as displayed in the case of *bobogi* arrangements, this does not necessarily lead to action from the side of state authorities. Instead, as the case of the *arizaboz* Mirzadi showed, authorities are very responsive to political and economic matters to ensure their dominance over the rural society. Knowledgeable writers include a political component in their letter by outright affirmation or reversing to hegemonic narratives of the regime. The ingenious political alignment of letters leads potentially to a more attentive response by authorities. However, the examples above have also shown how smallholder farmers' attempts of forum shopping, i.e. involving various administrative bodies to claim the rule of law, conclude rather useless. Authorities are reluctant to interfere in general issues on local level. Farmers' eventually reverse to the President is a desperate reaction to this situation; however, this remains also an unlikely manoeuvre. Thus, knowledge and skills to compile *ariza* letters are relevant for rural dwellers because, as outlined earlier, letters are posing both, an option and a challenge to their livelihood. In order to make request more urgent, complaint letters focus on concrete persons, i.e. co-villagers, administrators or competitors. Denouncing others means to put pressure on this

person, but also to initiate local conflict solving mechanisms. Despite disturbing village harmony *tinji*, requests come to the attention of authorities and responsible persons at the state administration. Without such deliberate conflicts, requests are simply put on hold. Pending letters in deadlock are currently the norm. Stalled negotiations e.g. around land distribution are in most cases in the interest of established village elites that benefit from the *status quo*. To overcome deadlock situations it is necessary to disturb the communal *status quo*. Denunciations for instance to the ecology or corruption department provide an example for such fabricated conflicts. However, the effectiveness of claims made through *ariza* letters remains dubious, only a few *ariza* actually lead to state interventions. *Ariza* letters require facilitation through networks, which is, at the conditions of the Zarafshan Valley, is a privilege of local elites.

9 *Shifting Epistemic Cultures in the Zarafshan Valley*

With regard to knowledge in rural livelihoods, three main findings emerge from the empirical research in the Zarafshan Valley. Firstly, the devaluation of agricultural expertise among rural dwellers, secondly farmers' strong interest in knowledge practices that deal with governance arrangements and thirdly, shifting epistemic cultures which develop away from agricultural expertise. Thus, referring to the primary interests of this research, post-Soviet individualized expertise and knowledge practices, the findings show that despite the individualization of agricultural production, market oriented change processes do not entail an increased demand for expertise.

The first finding underlines the crisis of agricultural expertise in the individualized Zarafshani agriculture. Local farm households refuse to invest in specialized knowledge and information of agricultural production. The results of the field research underline the importance of local knowledge practices that are prevalent in rural communities. Individualized agricultural production in the Zarafshan Valley evolves within limited access orders (LAO), thus regimes that seek to control not only economic realms but also access to land, knowledge, information and participation in political processes. A second, important insight from the field research is the way how farmers seek knowledge practices as *bobogi* and *ariza* in order to manoeuvre LAO conditions and meshwork governance arrangements. Eventually, the chapter discusses thirdly how the decline of expertise against the rise of knowledge practices represents a change of farmers' approach to knowledge. The predominance of governance matters in the everyday life of individualized farm households is identified as central driver of

shifting epistemic cultures. The findings indicate the dwindling significance of specialized agrarian expertise while other knowledge practices are considered more relevant to maintain rural livelihoods.

Marginalization of Agricultural Expertise

The post-Soviet individualization of the Tajik agriculture turned out to be a challenge to the livelihoods of Zarafshani farmers. On the one hand side external processes as the deterioration of infrastructure and demographic changes influenced agricultural production. At the same time individual rural livelihoods had to be constructed, based on the households access to land. The transition from collective to individualized agriculture led to the discontinuation of former knowledge sources and practices that were often linked to the previous *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz* collective farm structures. The examples from the Zarafshan Valley make apparent the limitations of agricultural expertise in fostering rural economies as farmers' are reluctant to let expertise guide the operations of the individualized household farms.

Crisis of Agricultural Expertise

Remote Zarafshani farmers experienced the disappearance of the former Soviet advisory system as loss of contacts, expertise and subject matter authority. Previous centrally organized knowledge and information structures as the *agroprom* or academic insititutions are no longer available or work inadequately. Comparable new knowledge and information frameworks that systematically provide advice to farmers for instance on relevant crops and inputs have not been established. In the Zarafshan Valley no meaningful media coverage of local or regional agricultural economies bridges this gap. Given the limitations of the public sphere and political restrictions of media enterprises, the content

and reliability of the provided information are hardly considered by farmers either. Only remnants of former networks of agricultural research and advice remained operational in the Zarafshan Valley. As a consequence, agricultural expertise that is linked to state organizations, i.e. as the district agricultural department *agroprom*, is of disputable quality and poorly requested. There is no national extension programme of the Tajik state (Shtaltovna 2016). Private sector and international NGOs punctually reach out to inform farmers in the remote Zarafshan Valley, however their operations are timely limited. Potential knowledge sources, as the district agricultural department *agroprom*, are not for all rural dwellers accessible.

Reasons for farmers' plummeted interest in agricultural expertise derive also from missing economic incentives and the difficulty to realize an income from agriculture. The crisis of agricultural knowledge and expertise in the Zarafshan Valley results not at least from the fact that many Zarafshani' households do not consider agriculture as their principal livelihood strategy. Instead, rural households consider other knowledge assets more adequate to maintain their livelihoods. Farmers' information priorities orient to economic opportunities, option to accumulate farm land or ways to safeguard the existing basis of livelihood.

Contested Credibility of Agricultural Expertise

Besides the complicated approach to agricultural expertise, the crisis of agricultural expertise results also from questions regarding its quality and validity. The case of the selecting seed potatoes (Chapter 6) demonstrated how knowledge sources on local level potentially turn out unreliable and information not trustworthy. Farmers cannot easily identify the quality of seed potatoes and rely in a competitive context on external expertise and trusted information. Accordingly, large swaths of agricultural expertise

shifted from formerly public or semi-public domains to individual experts, i.e. the locally called 'experienced farmers' who are either retired former professionals or simply reputable elder farmers. Their knowledge is often outdated, as it is usually not linked to former education and training. Thus, the post-Soviet individualization of agriculture caused in the Zarafshan Valley not only the fragmentation of information, but also the deterioration of the quality of expertise. Symptomatically, the situation of incomplete and potentially unreliable information regarding seed potatoes leaves farmers uncertain. Accumulating credible knowledge about elite seeds requires networking with powerful elites who control the distribution of the variety. In consequence, investments in elite seed material are cancelled by most smallholder farmers who deliberately arrange with low quality local seeds. The selection process of the seed potatoes shows firstly the high degree of uncertainty around agricultural knowledge and agricultural expertise. Secondly, it underlines the fact that at the conditions of the Zarafshan Valley, agricultural expertise must be back-upped with additional knowledge practices in order to be verified, credible and thus implemented. In the case of seed potato selection, these additional knowledge practices refer to networking with elite potato farmers to verify the quality of seeds. This is not easily possible for the majority of local farmers. Especially smallholder farmers face difficulties to identify and access locally adequate, trustable knowledge. Trusted relations to knowledge sources are essential, so that knowledge and information can guide farmers' operations. Cases as the selection of potato seeds or considering the foundation of a *dehqon* farm underline how Zarafshani smallholder households find themselves unable to make informed decisions and therefore opt for maintaining the *status quo*. The impasse to obtain reliable information occurred also with

regard to the restructuring of agricultural enterprises, i.e. founding of the individual or family *dehqon* farm. Due to contradicting knowledge assets and unclear interference from authorities and elite figures, farmers eventually avoid taking decisions. Against this background, farmers usually consider only local knowledge assets as trustworthy as they seek to triangulate information and proof the validity of knowledge through networks and other informants. Potential alternative knowledge resources exist, however their availability depends on the individual skills to network. As the *bobogi* examples illustrated, the state administration eludes from settling local issues. Claiming meetings with district and sub-district officials is time consuming and does not necessarily lead to clear and reliable information. For average smallholder households, the transformation of agricultural knowledge structures is thus a source of uncertainty with regard to the poor reliability of knowledge. Uncertainty prevents especially smallholder farmers to invest in innovations, which are consequently implemented with reluctance or not at all. Farmers put priority at identifying reliable sources of knowledge, even at the cost of retaliating agricultural production. As a consequence, the available knowledge is hardly being implemented nor guides farmers operations. Expertise and advice appear incalculable especially for small and medium farmers, exposing the farm households to economic and livelihood risks, thus they abstain from innovation and potential economic opportunities.

Knowledge Practices to Manoeuvre Limited Access Orders

Another important insight from field research is the confirmation that the Zarafshani rural economy is a limited access order. Limitations in the agricultural sector occur firstly with regard to access to arable land. Although there is a general scarcity of arable

land in the Zarafshan Valley; however there is no predominant regulation how to get access to the available land. The significance of access arrangements for rural households in the Zarafshan Valley has become evident throughout field research. Negotiation and settlement of access arrangements takes place within three dominant normative systems: Norms related to Islam, norms related to the state and its organizations, as well as norms deriving from local values and moralities. These normative systems correspond with institutions, organizations and processes that negotiate local affairs. The actual negotiation processes have been described as meshwork governance arrangements, underlining that the nomination and particular constellation of the respective institutions, organizations developed differently throughout Zarafshani communities. Power and assertiveness of institutions, processes and institutions differ significantly even in nearby communities. Land access negotiations involve powerful communal institutions; however these differ throughout the various Zarafshani communities. Similar requests and disputes are differently negotiated, what renders predictability and security for local farmers more difficult. Following governance processes is an essential exercise for rural households in the context of LAO, i.e. the strong competition for scarce natural resources, the so called “race for assets” (Petrick and Pomfret 2016: 18). As *bobogi* claims underline, farmers in the Zarafshan Valley pay close attention to governance arrangements that concern access to natural resources. Meshwork governance emerges from the simultaneous and parallel presence of normative systems. The pluralism of institutions, hierarchies and processes entails that these, potentially bloc or compete with each other. With regard to the negotiations of access to arable land, changes are apparent in the Zarafshan area as the assertiveness of institutions and organizations is not guaranteed by

reference to a normative system. State organizations may selectively be weak, where local institutions are strong. Examples for such phenomena are the relative strength of institutions as *kalidi Islom* and *bobogi*. Inverse to this is the comparable weakness of the state land legislation. The focus on land negotiation processes in the Zarafshan Valley shows the competition, overlapping, collaboration and bricolage of different institutions and organizations, deliberate protracting of processes and even their complete avoidance. Zarafshani access negotiations are hybrid as they settle on various normative systems. This situation is conceptualized as meshwork governance, making explicit a diffuse notion of governance in the sense that authority is not a monopoly of the State, but shared amongst “competing organizations” (Manuel-Navarrete et al. 2009: 3). Sharing and fluctuation of power and authority is characteristic for meshwork governance processes, which build on and integrate different normative systems. The plurality of norms and processes allows farmers to seek power and support at different governance forums and networks, what means in the framework of the Zarafshan Valley to manoeuvre parallel and overlapping normative systems. Effectively, different norms varying from remnant Soviet values to Islamic rules, determine not only moralities in the Zarafshan Valley, but through these also access to natural resources. Legally access to land is regulated by the Tajik land code. It is state organizations that are in charge to implement and observe land reform legislation; however the respective authorities are only selectively present on local level. This means for the Zarafshan Valley that important decisions regarding the access to land are not only taken in the framework of the land code, but in different other forums under diverse normative signatures. The subsequent parallel and overlapping governance processes have caused some negative effects in the Zarafshan Valley, mainly the

above displayed unequal distribution of arable land. Consequently a high number of poor households emerged and introduced the aforementioned “race for assets” (Petrick and Pomfret 2016: 18). Government rulings to found individual *dehqon* farms further spurred the complicated competition for arable land. Such political encroachment in economic matters exactly constitutes limited access orders (LAO). Due to the absent land market and the officially finished land reform, any request for additional access to land is forced to subcutaneous strategies. Accordingly, Zarafshani’ farmers refer to a meshwork of different organizations, institutions and processes, which are settled in different normative systems. Results are achieved through networking with powerful persons and organizations, creating narratives that convince co-villagers or mobilizing power resources through payments and patronage. Such negotiations are opaque; however display an eventually durable arbitration between the interests of farmers, authorities, markets and local elites.

Mobilizing Religion: Bobogi as Knowledge Practice

Bobogi arrangements are a case in point how governance claims build on diverse normative systems present in the Zarafshan Valley and eventually structure the access to land. The institution *bobogi* is locally mobilized to determine access to arable land while it refers to local values, moralities and the right Islamic behaviour. *Bobogi* arrangements provide governance and turn out very stable in Zarafshani communities. As the case of *bobogi* land distribution to the Russian teacher [*muallimi Russi*] shows, it is still a powerful institution in the Zarafshan area. *Bobogi* arrangements proof the presence of meshwork governance, as important issues as the access to arable land are not solved on the base of laws, but with reference to local moralities. This means at first, underlining family values and respect to the ancestors. *Bobogi* refers to local traditions

through narratives of how the arable land was created. Such narratives link diffusely to Islamic values by recognizing the dignity of the elders and elaborating on the fidelity of the ancestors. The diffuse reference to Islam is comparable to the above mentioned practise of *amri mar'uf* in its attempt to enforce a particular narrative or perspective. *Bobogi* requests develop as narrative that blends cultural and religious values and believes such as the value of the family, respect and subordination to elders and ancestors, or the defence of home and property. It is setting interpretations of reality and undersigning moral aspects of a commonly assumed order.

Depicting *bobogi* as religious institution confirms with the popular understanding of the Qur'an, which is subsequently hard to contest. Individual reputation is relevant, potential shortcomings may cause negative effects in local governance processes that often involve majority decisions at the *maclisi umumi*, the board of elders or the assessment by the *rais*. Field work showed that land negotiations hardly ever can be solved on local level alone; instead require the support of local and sub-district institutions. Local institutions as the *mahalla* or the *shuroi deha* do not possess the political clout to settle durable access arrangements. The *mahalla* and other local institutions may decide for or against access negotiations, however lack the power resources to implement these decisions. Ruling on access negotiations through the state land laws takes rarely place as state authorities seek not getting involve in local access arrangements. Further, despite the legal framework of the Tajik land code and formalized governance process regarding the access to land, district and sub-district authorities work slowly and are plagued by notorious ambiguity. Local institutions as *bobogi* or *kalidi Islom* potentially provide immediate and durable decisions. In the Zarafshan Valley, institutions such as *bobogi* gained significance

in governance processes because they undersign religious values, which are prevalent in local communities. Reference to *bobogi* effectively influences governance processes, not least because it introduces a level of urgency and severity into notoriously intransparent and volatile state administration and government. Especially in the period after national independence, when the re-negotiation of access to natural resources was in full swing, insistence on religious values potentially provided stable decisions and implementation, whereas ruling coming from the central government produced uncertain results (Heathershaw 2009; Wiegmann 2007). In this regard the examples of *kalidi Islom* and *bobogi* show how the mobilization of religion is used to manoeuvre governance processes on local level; and how to provide governance at all. This must be seen in perspective with the general development of the Tajik society, continuously struggling between the religious and secular foundation of the state (Dudoignon and Qalandar 2014; Epkenhans and Nozimova 2013; Nourzhanov and Bleuer 2013). Thus, implicitly *bobogi* requests capitalize on both, local moralities and Islamic rules. Farmers maintain *bobogi* narratives to underline their belonging to the particular place. However, as *bobogi* requests may not be verified with evidence, it appears firstly as knowledge practice that seeks legitimacy from local and Islamic values. The case of the *bobogi* narrative is also in another aspect interesting, it indicates the importance of building individualized claims on generalized narratives. Creating a viable narrative is a concrete practice for claiming own interests. Local governance processes are setting ruling perspectives and interpretations of reality, thus deciding if something is considered corruption, injustice or against local values. Eventually, such processes are setting precedents of what the narrative order is, enabling subsequently the establishment of hegemonic

perspectives. Hegemonic narratives may mobilize the authority of local values or of the state, while levelling out or even criminalizing alternative meanings and narratives in society. Imposing the ruling narrative determines the generally accepted view by authorities or the public sphere on certain subject matters. *Bobogi* arrangements display a hegemonic narrative which is presented as everyday knowledge, shared by most rural dwellers and therefore difficult to contradict.

Ariza Letters to Manoeuvre Meshwork Governance

Ariza letters depict another knowledge practice among Zarafshani farmers to interfere in governance processes. *Ariza* as written complaints circulate frequently between local communities and district authorities in order to intervene in everyday affairs, referring to the normative system of the state. Letters are submitted to any kind of authority, who may judge the letters and potentially takes action accordingly, although, this is not a causal mechanism. Many letters are ignored, or worse, cause negative repercussions for the sender. The above discussed case of the army camp displayed the potential risks involved for letter writers (see chapter 8). This means, any non-hostile reaction to *ariza* letters may be considered useful for the sender. Under given political conditions in Tajikistan, possible investigations may turn easily against the authors of *ariza* who will then have to provide extra-payments in order to close the file. In the realm of agriculture, *ariza* letters underline individual or collective efforts to intervene in rural processes by focussing on concrete claims and requests. Farmers submit letters with identic issues, often claims for access to land, to various state authorities. Farmers' shopping forums may reach from sub-district level up to the presidential office. Issuing *ariza* letters is a knowledge practice that means not only to establish the letters, based on the right argument or narrative, i.e. the one that fits with

authorities. While ordinary farmers have little occasions to highlight their letters to authorities, the case of *arizaboz* writers exemplified how some individuals enforce their writing. Letters are facilitated in order to be effective, for instance through networking, the right timing, linking to hegemonic narratives and select the right forum of addressees. Therefore, knowledge and skills to compile *ariza* letters are highly relevant for rural dwellers, because letters are posing both, an option and a challenge to their livelihood. In order to make the own request more urgent, complaint letters focus on concrete co-villagers or competitors. Pointing at others means to increase pressure, either on the respective individual, but also on local conflict solving mechanisms. Despite village harmony *tinji* may be disturbed, subsequently the request comes to the attention of elites and state authorities. Without such measures many requests are simply put on hold. Pending letters in deadlock are rather the norm. Stalled negotiations around e.g. land distribution are in most cases in the interest of established village elites that benefit from the *status quo*. To overcome such deadlock situations it appears necessary to disturb the communal *status quo*. Denunciations to the ecology or corruption department provide an example for fabricated conflicts (see chapter 8). However, the effectiveness of claims made through *ariza* letters remains weak as long as they do not clearly link with power structures. Most letters are dismissed by authorities, only a few *ariza* actually lead to state interventions. Complaint letters potentially manoeuvre meshwork governance in rural areas by referring exclusively on the normative system of the state and its authorities. For instance juxtapose *ariza* writers the *de facto* meshwork of governance processes in the Zarafshan Valley to central ideological narratives of the state. This does not necessarily lead to action from the side of state authorities. However, as the view on the professional letter writers [*arizaboz*] corroborates,

authorities are responsive to ensure dominance over the rural society. Skilled writers thus outline political components of rural processes, strengthening the hegemonic narrative of the regime.

The Co-production of Limited Access Orders

The reality interpretations offered by *ariza* letters potentially settle the political landscape of the community by transposing the authoritarian features of the Tajik political system to rural areas. Thus, *ariza* have a significant impact on how agriculture is practiced in the Zarafshan Valley. Letters lead to interventions of state authorities in rural areas, whereas the actual issue of the letter is secondary as it serves as pretext to demonstrate power. Many *ariza* letters in the Zarafshan Valley refer to issues around access to land, land use and conflicts with competitors. Current neopatrimonial governance practices allow authorities on various pretexts as religious terrorism, corruption or libel to intervene with virtually any household in rural communities. This capacity of the state is exploited by *ariza* writers to employ the authoritarian power resources of the state to interfere in local affairs. Rural dwellers are constantly exposed to interventions of authorities or investigation from state departments. Examples such as the Darvonho case or the deliberate investigations of the ecology department underline how authorities may interfere in agricultural practices. Interventions display the power resources of the state, but implicitly also those of the sender who is able to mobilize authorities. It is common post-Soviet governance practice that rural dwellers may never be sure to have met legal requirements, thus remain vulnerable to authorities. Submitting complaint letters to authorities was common in pre-modern Central Asian cultures. It has been a widespread practice in the Soviet Union, fostered by the communist party and the state to control society from within (Fitzpatrick 1996; White 1983). Letter writing was part of the inner control culture of the Soviet Union that

contained denunciations, whistle-blowing and general suspicion towards non-locals, foreigners, which were generalized as agents (Lampert 1985). Such practices structure the public sphere and were promoted in the Soviet Union as kind of popular participation in interior politics and homeland protection (Fitzpatrick 1996). Much of this attitude and security logic appears to have prevailed in Tajikistan today. As Driscoll and others demonstrated, governance practices of the Tajik government and state are deeply Soviet (2015; Herbers 2006; Markowitz 2013; Roy 2007). Submitting complaint letters to the Tajik authorities refers thus to remnants of such Soviet moralities. *Ariza* letters affirmatively appeal to the normative system of the state, i.e. referring to dominant state narratives or hegemonic perspectives, and eventually serving authorities as pretext for interventions. Identifying such narratives and perspectives within the de-politicized, post-Soviet public sphere and in context of incomplete information is actually not easy. The so called *arizaboz*, skilled and knowledgeable local writers, frequently produce letters upon which authorities are ready to intervene in rural communities. Complaint letters, serve to exercise power and state control in rural areas. *Arizaboz* effectively survey the rural community for potential wrongdoings of rural dwellers and information worth to report to authorities. Accordingly, letter writers effectively serve as regulatory force on behalf of governmental authorities, threatening to report any state critical or independent behaviour on local level. *Ariza* letter writers refer on particular perspectives on everyday affairs that imitate statements of the president, i.e. denouncing alleged cases of corruption, opposition or religious manifestations, or the abuse of authority on local and district level. This way certain hegemonic narratives are claimed and interpretations of reality are imposed even in remote rural areas as the Zarafshan Valley. *Ariza* letters co-produce and

sustain for instance limited access orders by re-establishing and setting the institutional frame of what is considered correct and incorrect or legal and illegal, by tempting state entities to act. The normative system of the state, i.e. the president, the state ideology with related institutions, norms and processes is perpetuated and maintains the limited access orders in place. As the above examples of the *arizaboz* or the role of the ecology department highlight; *ariza* letters seek to link to the ideological framework and hegemonic narratives of the state as these are most likely to lead to positive results for the sender. Denunciations potentially provide immediate benefits to the sender, which outweigh complaints of spoiling the reputation of the village and compromising village peace *tinji*. The sheer quantity of *ariza* circulating is therefore an indicator for the strength and assertiveness of the state in rural areas, as letter writers assume a reasonable chance to get a response to their claim. In this regard, *ariza* letters are no simple expression of farmers, but a reference to the actual presence of the state in remote areas. *Ariza* letters provide a concrete chance that the respective requests are addressed, thus they anticipate the possible interference of authorities. Professional letter writers as *arizaboz*, by creating hegemonic narratives and maintaining limited access orders, thus fulfil the role of a government proxy in rural areas.

Shifting Epistemic Cultures in the Zarafshan Valley

The cases outlined above illustrate how post-Soviet transformation processes as the individualization of agriculture require farmers to focus on new knowledge assets. Knowledge sources and farmers approach to agricultural advice changed in the Zarafshan Valley. The findings underline how in particular smallholder households actually are not aiming for agricultural advice. While it is difficult for

Zarafshani rural households to secure a livelihood mainly from agriculture, much attention is scheduled towards safeguarding the principal requirements for farming. The vast majority of Zarafshani farmers pursue mixed income strategies; they do not focus on the professionalization of agriculture as full-time farming seems no viable livelihood. Farmers' renunciation of agricultural expertise while engaging in knowledge practices as *bobogi* and *ariza* underlines the common perception that especially networks and skills regarding governance arrangements guarantee the basis of rural livelihoods, i.e. the access to arable land. This view is confirmed by cases as the female farmers Hokima or Nasirat that show how farmers are being deprived of rights and property. Maintaining subsistence production and ensuring the household livelihood requires participation in village affairs as access arrangements to natural resources as arable land plots, pastures or water presuppose agreements within the local community. These are, as displayed above, not free of conflict. Everyday negotiations require skills and knowledge practices to underline the validity of claims and demonstrate authority in governance processes.

Bobogi and *ariza* arrangements provide ample evidence for meshwork governance throughout the Zarafshan Valley. Settling agricultural matters in the Zarafshan Valley means dealing with complex meshwork arrangements, involving institutions, organizations and processes from different normative systems. These governance processes evolve not as binary situations, but as contemporaneous meshwork of different interpretations of reality (Wirklichkeitsinterpretationen). Ambivalent political and economic contexts require rural dwellers to develop flexible responses to the different types of interpretations of reality, i.e. negotiating normative perceptions of order. In the Zarafshan Valley,

interpretations of reality correspond with particular knowledge practices, which can be schematized as follows.

Knowledge Practices	Interpretations of Reality Reference to Normative Systems
<i>Bobogi</i>	The promise of belonging to the rural community
<i>Ariza</i>	The promise of a neopatrimonial strong state
Reference to external knowledge, e.g. donor expertise	The promise of rationality and progress

Table 7 Zarafshani knowledge practices related to normative systems.
Source: The author

As displayed in the precedent table, knowledge practices seek to provide meaning and make sense by connecting to the prevailing normative systems. Reference to normative systems is essential for the local perception and establishment of order. The findings show that in the Zarafshan Valley hegemonic narratives make either reference to the Tajik state and its representatives or to Islamic and local values. Accordingly, related interpretations of reality comprise authority in processes of meshwork governance. The farmer as single independent actor may decide for various interpretations of reality therewith considering potential options along meshwork arrangements. The findings from the Zarafshan Valley indicate that there is a large room for manoeuvre as the interpretation of state legislation and religious practices are not clear cut.

Farmers seek to link with powerful networks in order to reduce the ambiguity of such processes. Everyday knowledge practices as *ariza* letters realize these linkages, for instance access to networks of powerful people, authorities or powerful individuals. Knowing about

personnel and working procedures of the district tax office, the *jamoat*, the ecology department, the district governor [*hokim*] etc. is considered a priority by local farmers as through these organizations the implementation of decisions is actually taking place in the Zarafshan Valley. On the contrary, knowledge of statutory law has hardly been concerned by rural dwellers. Instead of insisting on the abstract legal system, farmers understood that networking is required to solve problems through locally established governance mechanisms. References to Islam display another knowledge practice useful to impact on local arrangements. The demonstration of religious values and lifestyle serves villagers to enhance and justify for instance individual *bobogi* claims. Making Islamic lifestyle explicit is an effective knowledge practice to outcompete competitors in local governance processes by underlining the own belonging to the normative system of Islam. This way, everyday knowledge practices are central means to safeguard and maintain the households' livelihood and to potentially realize economic growth too. The findings reveal that farmers' interests in rural Tajikistan are currently not developing towards specialized agricultural expertise, but towards knowledge practices to manoeuvre governance arrangements. Thus, the research reveals that in the Zarafshan Valley the previous "engineering-oriented" (Van Assche et al. 2016: 38) epistemic culture in Soviet rural areas is substituted by individual farm management. With regard to knowledge, this individual farm management dismisses agricultural expertise in favour of knowledge practices to manoeuvre everyday governance processes to maintain the rural livelihood.

Epistemic Cultures Co-produced by Meshwork Governance Arrangements

Epistemic cultures are subject to change. They create, warrant and dismiss the knowledge that is constructed in society. Research findings indicate that the shifts of Zarafshani' epistemic cultures towards governance-oriented knowledge practices result predominantly from complex and unpredictable meshwork governance arrangements. Zarafshani farmers approach to knowledge reflects an ambiguous assemblage of normative systems and uncertain meshwork governance arrangements, which is poorly predictable and requires continuous attention.

The view on epistemic cultures displays the environments of knowledge production and its use. Underlying Tajik knowledge cultures, ideologies and hegemonic narratives are enforced by the neopatrimonial authoritarian state. The cult of personality around President Rahmon, which *de facto* impedes any critic of political, social or economic developments in the country, is one example. In recent years the Tajik government created uneasy feelings towards practising Islamic belief, equalling believers with political opposition. In rural areas, lower tier authorities, local elites or informants as *arizabos* frequently use vague and general accusations for their individual intentions.

Reference to Jasanoff's terminology makes explicit how rural epistemic cultures are co-produced together with local meshwork arrangements. Under conditions of the neopatrimonial authoritarian Tajik state, local governance is conceptualized as meshwork governance of institutions, organizations and processes that relate to different normative systems, e.g. the state, local values and Islam. In this regard epistemic cultures in the Zarafshan Valley are co-produced with meshwork governance arrangements, reacting on the modified preferences of individualized farm

households. The crisis of agricultural expertise recognized in the Zarafshan Valley made evident that farmers orient towards other knowledge assets. Farmers approach knowledge and information that suits their everyday needs, which turned out in the Zarafshan Valley as intensification of networking with potential power resources. Networking may provide a competitive advantage in obtaining the right seed potatoes or collecting the required documents to set up the individual *dehqon* farm. The findings illustrate how epistemic cultures shift in the context of the individualization of agriculture. Agricultural expertise without facilitation and support by trusted relationships, references to power resources or administrative guarantees may not be implemented. Failures of agrarian expertise, as e.g. regarding seed potatoes, indicate that agricultural knowledge is out of use as long as individual actors are not equipped with contextual, everyday knowledge about the right support network, which allows valuating knowledge assets and putting expertise into practice.

The findings further show how certain knowledge or the use of knowledge may become a resource of power within meshwork governance processes. *Ariza* and *bobogi* are knowledge practices potentially able to accumulate power to make an impact on governance processes. Thus, in the Zarafshan area, agricultural production requires the skilled combination of agricultural expertise and knowledge practices. Outbalancing these diverse knowledge assets to optimize agricultural production is even for local farmers no simple effort. Limited access orders in Zarafshani agriculture are pervasive, which means that farmers e.g. are not allowed to cut apricot trees on their land plots due to unclear administrative regulations such as for instance the arbitrary interventions of the ecology department. Farmers obey to such implicit regulations, as behind these rules stand organizations, institutions or processes

that are able to exercise power and punish rural households. Thus, eventually knowledge practices to circumvent prohibition and sanctioning out-compete the expertise of adequate production practices. In everyday life farmers judge institutions for their assertiveness, i.e. their capacity to sanction.

The Negative Co-production Cycle in the Zarafshani' Agriculture

As noted earlier for Tajik rural areas, uncertain meshwork governance conditions lead to a situation of ontological insecurity among rural dwellers (Boboyorov 2013b), resulting in short-term arrangements with negative impact on farming. As a consequence, smallholder farmers limit themselves to subsistence farming, abandon agricultural production completely or neglect farming as minor relevant to maintain the household's existence. With regard to agriculture, the current epistemic culture in the Zarafshan Valley is determined by the negative co-production cycle of meshwork governance and knowledge practices to safeguard livelihoods. Due to farmers' perception of uncertainty, the local epistemic culture orients towards safeguarding property, maintaining access to land, mobilizing power networks; while it disregards at the same time long term investments, seed selection or soil improvement. With regard to Zarafshani agriculture, the current mode of mobilizing knowledge and knowledge practices is negative. Uncertain governance processes request knowledge practices, at the cost of developing agricultural expertise and implementing innovations. This constellation is cementing the poor economic perspectives of smallholders. Thus, large parts of Zarafshani smallholder farm households have stopped orienting towards economic growth through agriculture. Rural dwellers see improvements to their livelihoods deriving mainly from non-agricultural labour. The negative co-production cycle of local epistemic cultures indicates

why farmers are selectively unable to make informed farming decisions; making it difficult to re-start the agricultural sector in remote rural areas.

10 Epistemic Conditions and Agricultural Development

Recapitulating the starting point of this research, the study set out to analyse individualized farmers approach to knowledge in marginal agricultural areas in Tajikistan. Focussing on post-Soviet expertise and knowledge practices, the research asked, which knowledge farmers' request and mobilize in order to maintain the individualized agricultural production and everyday rural livelihoods. To begin with, the findings demonstrate that farmers in the remote Zarafshan Valley are operating individually, with little occasions and incentives for collective action. Thus, in the research area the post-Soviet individualisation of agrarian structures has been thoroughly. Under the conditions of the neopatrimonial authoritarian state combined with economic limited access orders LAO, individualized farmers face difficulties to participate in political processes. Networking with important persons and the skilful use of knowledge practices are strategies of individualized farmers to pursue own interests. The findings corroborate the initial hypothetic assumption that the reluctant economic development of the agricultural sector in the Zarafshan Valley is not related to the availability of knowledge and information. The findings verify a crisis of agricultural expertise, because it does not guide farmers' operations. Farmers request credible and trusted sources of agricultural expertise before they deliberate about its potential implementation. Such confirmation is not always available. The findings demonstrate the poor request of agricultural expertise and illustrate that the reluctant agro-economic development in marginal rural areas as the Zarafshan Valley is not caused by deficits of agricultural expert knowledge.

Following Flyvbjergs claim of an interdisciplinary social science approach (2001), this study puts the focus on values and rationales that guide farmers' decisions how to maintain production and rural livelihoods. The research contributes empirically to the comprehension of how knowledge is approached among farmers in the Zarafshan Valley to maintain rural livelihoods. The wide distribution of knowledge practices as *bobogi* and *ariza* underlines that Zarafshani farmers approach, use and production of knowledge is closely related to governance processes on various levels. Thus, the political economy of the neopartimomial authoritarian state and the conditions of meshwork governance structure the way how farmers organize knowledge and expertise.

Throughout post-Soviet agricultural transformation, Zarafshani epistemic cultures moved from professional agricultural expertise, as established by the former collective farms, towards individual knowledge practises. The perspective on epistemic cultures demonstrated how other types of knowledge became important to individualized households. Zarafshani farmers focus on knowledge practices for being involved in political processes to ensure access to natural resources, markets and administration became apparent. Concentrating on knowledge practices as *bobogi* and *ariza*, farmers place priorities on networking to interfere in governance processes. Consequently, this entailed that in the Zarafshan Valley distinctively negative epistemic conditions emerged, creating structural problems for agricultural expertise. The individualized agricultural sector in the Zarafshan Valley requires twofold governance arrangements. At the one side, state induced LAO entail the competition over natural resources and other assets. On the other side, ambiguous governance arrangements as meshwork arrangements implement decisions despite contradicting normative systems in place. So is, for instance, the national legislation to

protect civil rights or businesses matters against intrusive practices of local elites or subregional authorities rarely applied. The findings demonstrate that in particular access negotiations to arable land unfold as meshwork governance, with highly flexible justifications, procedures and implementations. As the individualization of agriculture coerced farmers to actively design and shape governance processes, making use of the outlined knowledge practices, in order to maintain rural livelihoods.

On another aspect, the conceptional contribution of the research lies in displaying the co-production of knowledge and governance as an interlaced process in rural Central Asia. The findings show that at present time agricultural related knowledge in the Zerafshan Valley comes into being co-produced as assemblage of different normative systems within local meshwork governance arrangements. Assumingly, similar forms of meshwork governance occur elsewhere in Central Asia among comparable authoritarian state regimes. Co-productionist thinking (Jasanoff 2004) underlines the permanent mutual exchange between governance processes and the social construction of knowledge. Epistemic cultures, which display “in a given field” how people know what they know (Knorr-Cetina 1999: 1), create and warrant the use of knowledge. The perspective on epistemic cultures emphasizes the prevalence of governance oriented knowledge practices in Zarafshani rural communities. The framework of epistemic cultures refers to the phenomenon that knowledge assets not necessarily complement each other, but are being blocked and restrained by contradicting normative orders. Analysing smallholders’ approach to knowledge through the concept of epistemic cultures proves that Zarafshani households barely consider agricultural advice and expertise to maintain livelihoods. Thus, the findings detail that the individualized agriculture in the Zarafshan Valley so far did not follow the

development paradigm of a positive correlation between the individualization of property and increased production efficiency development (Rizov 2004; Verdery 2004). Only very few individualized farm enterprises actually focus on increased agricultural productivity. The majority of Zarafshani smallholder households is exposed to poverty and pursues a part-time agricultural livelihood, i.e. maintaining subsistence production. Respectively, a large proportion of individually producing farmers dismissed the significance of specialized expertise. The massive reduction of full-time agricultural livelihoods in the Zarafshan Valley, explains partially farmers reduced interest in agricultural expertise. It is in this regard difficult to determine the relation between access to quality agricultural expertise and livelihood standards in the Zarafshan Valley. However, it is apparent that the crisis of agricultural expertise is not favourable for improving neither rural livelihoods nor market oriented agricultural production. The challenging context to agricultural expertise in the Zarafshan Valley underlines the evident shift of epistemic cultures that took place in respect to the previous, highly specialized Soviet agriculture. Credibility became an essential characteristic for knowledge assets. Therefore media and advisory services are hardly considered. The selection of seed potatoes showed the necessity of trust to verify knowledge assets. Technical advice is mainly provided through local networks, which are considered reliable, although these structures are hardly open to external expert knowledge. Uncertainty regarding agricultural expertise has consequently detrimental effects on farmers' investments and production practices: As a result, farmers do neither invest in most productive elite potato seeds, nor do they act pro-actively to become individual *dehqon* farmer.

Thus, the present study documents that in the course of agricultural restructuration processes Zarafshani smallholder farmer's interest in agricultural expertise and advice is reduced to immediate local requests. In contrast to the previous Soviet expertise system, individual farm households developed a critical relation to expertise and advice, which they find difficult to implement.

Overcoming the Negative Co-production Cycle

In contrast, the findings make explicit how Zarafshani smallholder farmers seek being involved in governance processes that potentially ensure access to natural resources, markets and administration. Farmers' developed knowledge practices that facilitate participation in governance processes. The common distribution of *bobogi*, *ariza* and networking with the administration confirms the change of epistemic cultures among individualized farm households in the Zarafshan Valley. Farmers are inclined towards safeguarding property, gaining access to land and mobilizing power networks, instead of long term investments, seed selection or soil improvement. The uncertainties of meshwork governance arrangements request everyday knowledge practices, at the cost of developing agricultural expertise and implementing innovations. Such epistemic conditions are effectively cementing the economic perspectives of smallholder farmers. Not accidentally, the majority of Zarafshani households produce only occasionally for the market. LAO mean limited access to resources as input and land, but also limitations for the development of knowledge. Namely smallholder farmers face massive difficulties in accessing meaningful knowledge and information, which results consequently in the reduction of agricultural innovation. These findings make apparent that current epistemic conditions in the Zarafshan Valley are not conducive for agricultural production as they are not designed to increase productivity and the share of

livelihood coming from agriculture. In consequence, Zarafshani rural dwellers potentially drop out of agriculture in favour of alternative, non-agricultural livelihoods, and continue to do so. New knowledge assets that are taken-up, co-produced and reinforced are not primarily related to agriculture. Instead Zarafshani farmers feel obliged to build complex and complicated resilience strategies, which consume significant resources. In the neopatrimonial Tajik state, networking and knowledge practices are central to increase the households' resilience against natural or economic shocks and lack of administrative assistance, which may challenge the very basis of rural livelihoods. Against the assemblage of diverse normative systems and highly flexible meshwork governance, rural dwellers seek support by a mix of organizations, processes and institutions. The present study identified in three normative systems that determine agricultural matters in the Zarafshan Valley: Islamic religion, state authorities and local values and traditions. Knowledge practices such as *bobogi* and *ariza* are striking examples for attempts to mobilize power by making reference to explicit normative systems. Both knowledge practices, *bobogi* and *ariza*, focus on interference in local governance processes, thus, are not conducive for agricultural production. It is in this regard that the situation among rural dwellers in the Zarafshan Valley appears as negative co-production cycle with local epistemic cultures indicating why farmers are selectively unable to make informed farming decisions. Zarafshani epistemic cultures are dominated by knowledge practises that emerge co-produced by meshwork governance. In consequence, epistemic cultures emerge together with local meshwork arrangements and limited access orders, and unfold negatively, i.e. in disfavour of agricultural knowledge.

Reshaping Epistemic Conditions

Tajikistan's LAOs thus entail a negative co-production cycle, which appears the main reason for the limited production, use and dissemination of agricultural expertise. Potentials and impact of agricultural advisory services in Tajikistan are therefore limited. The findings of the present research illustrate why the individualization of agriculture in the Zarafshan Valley has not led to increased productivity and specialization of farmers. Neopatrimonial post-Soviet authoritarian states have difficulties to formulate and implement coherent agricultural policies (Petrick and Pomfret 2016). In the case of Tajik remote rural areas, the policies of agricultural individualization turned out as challenge especially to smallholders' livelihoods. Limited access orders combined with a race to access natural resources established unfavourable epistemic conditions for agricultural expertise. The findings demonstrate that smallholder farmers lean towards knowledge practices, as they have in the context of meshwork governance only little incentives to approach specialized agricultural expertise. This is one reason for the protracted agro-economic performance in remote rural areas: Uncertain governance conditions are not favourable for farmers to implement new knowledge. Deliberate governmental voids along LAOs and meshwork arrangements leave a vacuum that allows at the one hand site more powerful actors to employ uncertainty in their interest. At the same time will those actors who are less connected and less powerful have difficulties to ensure the own interests. Under present conditions, Zarafshani farmers' incentives lie with following up governance processes. Agricultural expertise needs facilitation to be considered on local level that means concrete support by local elites to increase the room for manoeuvre within LAO environments. Due to the neopatrimonial authoritarian policy making in current Tajikistan, general political settings in the capital

have direct impact on how the agricultural sector develops in remote rural areas. Thus, the results of my research indicate that the rehabilitation of expertise in the Tajik agriculture is not primarily linked to the restructuration of agricultural advisory services, but to efforts of creating reliable governance conditions in rural areas. This entails also to recognize the potential role of local elites and partially their material requests due to their function of representing the integrity of the state in rural areas.

Macro processes such as shifting epistemic cultures have policy implications for the whole of Tajikistan. Crosscutting processes as the individualization of agriculture, the emergence of limited access orders and meshwork governance enrolle the whole of the rural society. Against these conditions, one central task is to re-start the co-production cycle of knowledge and local governance in a positive way, i.e. in favour of knowledge and the development of the agricultural sector. In the case the Zarafshan Valley this would mean to reduce farmers request for governance related knowledge practices. Stabilizing governance means reducing meshwork governance arrangements in favour of formalized processes and clearing the role and significance of normative systems. Such clearance would potentially incentivize farmers turning their focus on agricultural expertise. The findings broadly outline that uncertainty deriving from meshwork governance arrangements slowed down investments in individualized agricultural production. The absence of stable and predictable governance processes prevented farmers from taking economic risks, making investments in the individual *dehqon* farm or pursuing temporal access arrangements. Stabilizing governance processes, i.e. reducing meshwork uncertainty, eventually allows farmers to approach to the required agricultural expertise. Thus, communication channels as media, telephone and internet may increase impact, as well as

state organized advisory services and administrative structures such as the district agricultural department [*agroprom*]. Information sources and advice concern technical expertise on production matters, but also regarding the competent overview and valuation of state agricultural policies. Such efforts to strengthen the public sphere would belong to a non-authoritarian modernisation project that goes beyond the agricultural sector. The post-Soviet republics in Central Asia have difficulties to embark on such a model of national modernisation, however as experiences in Kirgizstan and Kazakhstan show, are not impossible. Further research is required to seek pathways for the gradual transformation in favour of agricultural expertise. With regard to the Tajik rural development, research is needed to identify policies that render the state authoritarian modernisation programme efficient, provided the state develops a vision for the aspired rural development.

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